

# A CUP of COURAGE



MINA LEVITON

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By MINA LEWTON

Emerging from adolescence, in the chrysalis-breaking moment when life is touched with the golden haze of brightest promise, Brook Falter at seventeen is poignantly made aware of the flaw in the Falter background. She realizes that her father, Sam Falter, newspaperman, has long had his own way of escaping the realities and though for a long time the Falter drinking habit has had a place in her earliest memories, it is only now that its weight of meaning and implication is deeply felt by her. A way is offered her to leave their already dwindling family and its problems, but Brook finds the courage and borrows the wisdom to meet the crises of discovery and solution.

It is Brook's thinking it through, finally, that provides a new sense of responsibility for Sam Falter and gives importance to the book. Bound inextricably with the foreshadowed delicate romance is the career which inevitably suggests itself to Brook Falter.

The story is written with richness of background and incident and understanding, vivid portraiture. It is a full-length story that presents a "problem parent" novel of far-reaching significance.

*(continued on back flap)*

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*A Cup of Courage*



# *A CUP of* COURAGE

By MINA LEWITON



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*To the memory  
of my mother*



## *A Cup of Courage*



# *A Cup of Courage*

**A**FTERWARD it became a hidden place to come to, as one might come to talk to a dearly loved, wise person. For it had this odd property, or so Brook thought even now when she had reached seventeen, that if one looked at its riffled water long enough—or if the day were still and the clouds floated in its pale reflection of sky, or at twilight when it slowly became an inky spreading blot—Frog Pond could help find the answer to whatever was puzzling or uncertain. Not always, of course, but nearly always.

But in the beginning—in the beginning and for a long time—it was only a place to walk to and from. After a gentle downgrade the path turned sharply right and between two giant willows one suddenly saw Frog Pond. It was perhaps most magical in early springtime surrounded by its low shrubs of flowering

*almond and tall redbud and high above its banks the fine green lacework of tree branches.*

*They had found it together, her mother and Brook, when they had first come to South Ebury. For a time a long walk meant a walk there and back, until Brook found friends and there was no longer the daily walk with her mother. But in those early days her mother would suggest taking a rest before they started back. Sometimes Tommy, who was almost three years older than Brook, came along. Brook then sat dreamily listening to Tommy and their mother talk in low voices together, and perhaps Tommy was remembering something that had happened in their grandmother's house. Or perhaps it was that, sitting beside Frog Pond, she thought of pleasant things and so of the house they had known so well when they were little children.*

GRANDMOTHER'S house stood in a serene east street off Central Park. It was, in memory, an enormous house and most of the floors, where the rugs left off, were slippery and one could slide a foot out and back as on ice. There was Foster who called her Little Miss Brook in an odd way as if he were laughing at her and called Tommy, *Master* Thomas, in the same laughing-at-him way. And there was Mrs. Williams who looked at both of them as if she expected them to do something dreadful at any moment.

Grandfather was the fierce one. "He was in a perfect rage today," Grandmother Falter would say. She did not, however, seem in the least upset over it and went on calmly with whatever small task she was doing, arranging the roses or pouring the tea from the silver tea-kettle, or mending something delicate and lacy. Sometimes the children heard

their grandfather shouting over the telephone at his law partner, Mr. Woodward, whom Grandfather addressed as J.C. Or he would shout at Foster or, frequently, at their father, the words exploding downward from the library upstairs, "Look here, Sam, I refuse to assume any further debts. You have your responsibilities. I have mine."

Grandfather's beard and mustache had the smell of medicine. "Brook, kiss your grandfather," Mother said, and Brook did, holding her breath.

Once Brook said to her mother, "I don't want to kiss Grandfather."

"Please behave, Brook darling," her mother said. "Why don't you want to kiss Grandfather?"

But she would not tell about the medicine smell.

Grandmother's skin was soft and smooth and Brook held her tightly when she kissed her cheek. It made Brook think of lilacs and of the talcum powder box on Grandmother's dresser with the immense lilac bouquet painted on it.

She reached up once for the talcum box but it fell and some of the powder spilled on her new pale yellow dotted-Swiss dress. She rubbed away the powder but the lilac smell remained in it and long after she left Grandmother's house she could smell the faint perfume of Grandmother's darkened bed-

room with its hushed quiet that made you want to walk on tiptoe.

When Grandfather was sick, Brook met Jane Sutherland. Mother smiled at Brook, the dimple high in her right cheek now plainly showing as she said, "Brook, here is somebody who knew you when you were a baby. Aunt Jane helped take care of you." But Brook could not remember having seen Aunt Jane ever before and was certain Aunt Jane was not her aunt at all, at least not in the same way that Aunt Marian was.

Mrs. Sutherland was taking care of Grandfather. She looked very young and pretty for all her firmness with him, not allowing him to telephone J. C. and not even letting him raise his voice at anyone in the house.

If only Foster and Mrs. Williams weren't there she would have loved Grandmother's house, and if Grandfather didn't have to be kissed. The walnut banister was wide and sloping, not steeply as in their own house, but gradually. It would make a beautiful ride but you could never try it because Mrs. Williams or Foster always seemed to be nearby and, besides, at the bottom of the stairs was a bronze lady looking up at a cluster of red glass cherries in her held-up hand.

The glass cherries had a light inside them which was put on when it grew dark. The bronze lady stood on a small table and the table was set inside the curve of staircase at the very end of the banister and very close to it, and you would surely ride right into it if you were coming down. That would be dreadful. It might be the thing that Foster and Mrs. Williams were expecting to happen when they looked at Tommy and herself.

In the dining room in Grandmother's house there was the long carved buffet. That was where Foster brought the covered dishes but Mrs. Williams did the serving and always cleared away. Beneath the small-paned window was the server which was carved like the buffet except that it was smaller.

The server was only as tall as Brook. Standing beside it and looking upward, Brook could see the colors in the odd-shaped bottles, dark red and light red and pale gold and there was one that was brilliant beautiful green, and another that was clear as water, but there was an astonishing thing about it. Standing upright inside the bottle was a snow-and-ice-covered twig of a real tree. When the sun came through the tall window the colors in the bottles danced and sparkled.

Often her father would hold up one of the bottles

to the light and then pour a glassful out of it and Brook could see how the color in the thin glass was a little brighter than in the bottle. Once, as he was lifting the glass, Grandmother came into the room and said, "Sam, please be careful. You know you must drive the children home."

Later Brook went to the pantry for a glass of water. She put both hands on the black smooth door-knob that was as high as her head. It was hard to turn and it needed both hands and, as she raised herself on her toes to put her strength into turning the knob she heard Foster's voice over the high delicately-ringing sound of the china they were drying. She could not help hearing.

"The old lady says to him, *Sam, please be careful*. But when I asked this morning if I was to take the liquor off the server she says to me, *No, Foster, it would seem too obvious*."

"*Obvious*, did she say?" Mrs. Williams asked in astonished disbelief, adding, "As if Sam Falter's drinking isn't become as obvious as the nose on my face. He is as bad as the old gentleman."

"Worse," said Foster, and repeated, "*It would seem too obvious*."

She stood still, then took her cold small fingers away from the doorknob. She turned away. Her

heart beat quickly, as in fright. Sam Falter. Her father. *Sam Falter's drinking*. It was shameful and secret but she had known about it for a long time. Now they knew about it too.

When Brook was six, Grandfather Falter died and the bottles disappeared from the server.

There was a chandelier in their own house that was almost as beautiful as the light through the colors in Grandfather's bottles. That was when they lived in New York in West Eleventh Street, or perhaps it was West Ninth Street. They lived for a time in both streets, had in fact lived in so many places it was hard for Brook to remember where a particular thing had happened.

The chandelier was in the drawing room of one house they lived in. It was a vast room with a mirror over the marble fireplace and in that mirror that reached to the high ceiling you could see the whole chandelier again so it was as if they had two crystal chandeliers. The colors flashed and winked when the lights were put on. Green small fires and orange and red ones.

Sometimes, after bedtime, Tommy and Brook, hearing booming laughter and conversation from below came out of their upstairs rooms and sat on

the top step of the long stairway. That made them level with the chandelier, but sooner or later Tommy would become restless and make a sound and they would be discovered and sent to bed. Brook would have loved to stay there all night, watching the small winking fires in the crystal pendants of the chandelier.

Once their father, catching sight of them, brought them down in their nightclothes and sat them beside each other on the long dark green satin sofa. The room seemed full of people.

"Now, son," he said, "tell us what you're going to do when you grow up."

"Chop down trees. *Timber-r-r-r!*" Tommy shouted mightily.

"It'll put you in the chips, anyway, Tommy," someone said and all of them laughed and someone else said, "Well, let the chips fall where they may," and a tall girl, pretending to write down notes as in an interview said anxiously, "Any message for your readers? Any thought for the day?" and turning to the others said, "Perhaps you'll notice I've refrained from saying he's a chip off the old block."

"I'll make paper out of the trees," Tommy said undaunted. "Lots of paper."

"Born newspaperman." There was laughter again and one man loudly applauded.

Tommy was greatly encouraged by the laughter and applause, "And I'll write stories for the newspaper and I'll work the presses and deliver the papers."

"That's telling the lazy old newspaper publishers, Tommy, old boy."

"Tommy Falter, inventor of the one-man newspaper."

"Here's to you."

They raised the glasses they all were holding.

"And what about you, Brook? What are you going to be?" their father said, holding her hand tightly closed up inside his own.

"Somebody," Brook said secretively, and looked down at the sprigs of forget-me-nots in her flannel nightgown. She would not begin to vie with Tommy's breathless plans, yet felt warmly secure.

"I fervently hope so," Sam Falter said.

Everyone praised them, and their mother who was wearing a long black lace dress took them upstairs at last. They were pleased with themselves.

In the summer when the windows that opened like doors stood wide, the chandelier's crystals gently

swayed and there was the faint sound of crystal against crystal. It was like faraway music.

Her father always seemed to be enjoying himself hugely, lifting his head up and laughing, or saying something to make someone else laugh. He could make anybody laugh. He could make his voice change from his own to one that was almost precisely like Miss Crandall's who taught dancing to Brook when Brook was six and a half, or brisk and matter-of-fact like Uncle Henry's.

At dinner, once, their father was pretending that Uncle Henry was learning to dance, Miss Crandall showing him the steps. Now the whole idea of Uncle Henry wanting to dance with Miss Crandall, or even wanting to converse with her, was so unbearably funny as to cause Brook nearly to fall off her chair, but when their father, as Uncle Henry, insisted that he must learn to *pirouette*, Brook did fall off her chair and had to be retrieved. Tommy, seeing how successful their father's imitations were, resolved to be funny on his own and began imitating Father imitating Miss Crandall. Even their mother who could always restore Tommy to good behavior, could not this time for she herself was laughing.

Later when her father came in to say goodnight,

Brook begged him to be Miss Crandall for just one more minute, and he was, and she laughed all over again, and then he bent to kiss her goodnight and there was about him when he bent over her, the same medicine smell of Grandfather's.

When their grandmother came to visit, she sang to Brook at bedtime.

*I give myself a shake, shake, shake, and turn myself around.*

They were unusual, delightful words arranged in a far more interesting way than any everyday conversations Brook heard.

Sometimes her grandmother held Brook on her lap and asked her, "Do you want a story or a poem?" Most often Brook asked for a poem. Two lines of one of Grandmother's poems she remembered forever,

*Standing with reluctant feet*

*Where the brook and river meet . . .*

She learned the words long before she understood their meaning.

Grandmother was gentle and soft-spoken and cheerful. Brook remembered how she looked as she said to their father, "Yes, Sam." Brook could not

remember ever hearing her say, "No, Sam." But sometimes when she said, "Yes, Sam," it seemed to Brook she was oddly troubled.

When Brook thought about it she could see that each new house they lived in was smaller than the last. The crystal-chandelier drawing room was very large but afterward they did not live in a whole house. Instead, all of the rooms were on one floor.

Then Grandmother was ill for a long time and Tommy and Brook were allowed to stay only a few minutes in Grandmother's bedroom. And at last Grandmother died and they never again saw Foster nor Mrs. Williams nor the house off Central Park.

There were times afterward when their mother wanted them away from home for a reason they did not understand at first, then, when they did, pretended not to. At such times Tommy and Brook went for days or a week to Aunt Jane Sutherland's house in the nearby suburbs of Long Island, and sometimes there were visits to Aunt Marian's at Sea Point, farther out on Long Island.

When Tommy was nearly thirteen and Brook past ten, they moved to South Ebury, a Long Island town settled, according to the signpost on Central Avenue, in 1754. There were many great and venerably gnarled trees along all its roads and walks.

Tommy was very strong and he was the best runner of his class and the best climber of trees, it was discovered; but one day the principal of South Ebury School announced at the assembly that there was to be no climbing of trees in the neighborhood of the school because the trees, he very much regretted to say, had been damaged in some cases. Tommy who had started them all climbing had to stick to running and games on the ground.

They were both tall by then and Brook had filled out a little and often had bright cheeks and, miraculously, the dimple now appeared on the high part of her right cheek that her mother had in the same spot, and her hair showed the least sign of waving. Tommy was outgrowing all his clothing and was the tallest of his age in the whole eighth grade.

"This marvellous air is making Brook's hair curl," their father said. "And Tom's as tall as I am. Glad we had the good sense to get out of the city."

"I hope you won't mind the commuting," their mother said to him. "And this is the most we can get for our money."

Brook found friends or rather, a friend, five days after they came to South Ebury. The preceding days seemed a long lonely time. Then, as the girls were

leaving school on Friday afternoon, Sue asked Brook if she wanted to share her umbrella. There was a light spring rain falling.

Brook was grateful and shy to speechlessness. She nodded quickly. The offer of umbrella-sharing held untold implications of friendship. They went out together at the side door and for a moment Brook had the uncomfortable thought that her mother might be waiting with rubbers and umbrella at the main gate. Her footsteps began to lag.

Sue said, "I wonder if one of my aunts might be waiting with rubbers. It would be just like them to worry over me. I suppose I ought to see." They both stood still. "Is someone waiting for you, too, do you think?" Sue asked.

"I guess my mother is." Brook reluctantly detached herself from the fascination of a walk with a new friend.

"We better look."

They began slowly to go back.

Not at all hopefully, Sue asked, "Do you think you're going to like it here?"

Up to the moment Sue had spoken to her on the subject of umbrella-sharing, Brook had been unsure but now she said, even surprising herself, "Oh, yes," and was suddenly and hastily voluble. "There's one

place we walked to along the Maybury Road. It's quite a walk from here. When you get there, there's a little lake. Do you know where I mean?"

"Frog Pond? It's fun for skating. We all go as soon as it's frozen hard. It freezes quickly because it's shallow."

"Is it called Frog Pond?" It seemed an old familiar place now that it had a name and they both knew it. "My brother's teaching me figure skating. He'll teach you too," Brook added generously. "That is, if you're not a figure skater already."

"I'm not," Sue said, "and never hope to be. I'm not graceful. Do you like dancing?"

Brook did, but was unwilling in this poised precarious moment to take a definite stand. "Do you?"

"Hate it," said Sue.

Brook nodded.

Sue's aunt and Brook's mother had begun to talk to each other before the girls appeared and Mrs. Falter invited Sue to come home with them for what remained of the afternoon.

In this history-making spring day, Tommy too, it seemed, had found a friend—a dark-haired, gray-eyed, freckled classmate who clearly saw eye to eye with Tommy on all subjects. At half-past six neither of

the new friends seemed inclined to leave and Mrs. Falter asked both to stay for supper. She did the necessary telephoning.

Jane Sutherland on a first visit to South Ebury, was surprised to find Brook and Tom each with a guest at table exactly as if the Falters had been old-established residents.

Over supper, Sam Falter did his best to win his audience. Young people had always been his favorites. He was one of them, only that his experience had been wider than theirs and covered a longer period of time. Any young person could see that.

He always looked as if he were giving all his attention to whatever he was saying or doing at the moment and whoever talked to him had every bit of his interest. It was a manner of his, Brook sensed, because sometimes he wasn't as attentive as he looked, but everyone liked to have that attention of Sam Falter's. His eyes were large and dark and his black hair was, most of the time, thoroughly brushed and shining, as now. His features were strong and easily remembered. He looked as if he were a writer or an artist. No one mistook him for anything else. Occasionally someone called him Doctor.

He was embarked on a story of his earliest report-

ing days and telling it with an occasional pause and a quick warm smile for one or another of them.

"I was interviewing General Joyce who intended to wind up the interview with some Memorable Words. Memorable Words are what most public figures aim for, you know. I had my notebook in my hand and the General stood and began on his Memorable Words.

" 'You might say I pray nightly for—' Then came a pause. I was patient but it did become a bit embarrassing.

"The General began all over again—'You might say I pray nightly—'

"The General was frankly stuck but neatly reconnoitred. 'I presume I'll see this interview before it gets into print?'

" 'If you like,' I said, " 'but—' "

" 'Well, send me a copy of all I've said and leave a blank after *I pray nightly*—I'll think of something.' "

Brook was very proud of him. He wanted them to like him and he had made them like him in these few minutes. She saw Sue's bright color as she followed every word and Aunt Jane's friendly amused eyes and her mother's smile that showed her dimple and saw, too, Philip's open admiration. Philip had sur-

rendered at once to Sam Falter. Tom, glancing at Brook, reflected her own pride in their father.

"We come now," and Sam Falter reached over for a copy of the *South Ebury Press* that lay nearby, "to a rival publication." A sample copy had been delivered at the Falters' earlier in the afternoon. He glanced down its front page and looked up at them, plainly regretful. "I've never worked on a paper that would give me a front page position with a dispatch like this," he said. There was a pleasant expression on his face as he read aloud—

"A single case of mumps breaks the unusually fine attendance record of the *South Ebury Kindergarten*. Get well, Roberta, and let's have 100% attendance as formerly."

He turned to look at Philip who had his eyes on Sue.

There was a moment's silence, then Sue said breathlessly, "The *Press* is my father's paper." She was a little frightened and unhappy but she had to say it. She couldn't have told them why.

Sam Falter glanced at the paper's masthead and leaned toward her and patted the back of her hand. "Well, tell Mr. Willey from me," he said gently, "that I for one can't wait for next week's kindergarten attendance record." It was nonsense and

everyone, including Sue, knew it but Sam Falter sounded so genuinely sorry and looked so disarmingly at Sue that her face suddenly altered its unhappy expression and she smiled widely. "Our family never reads the *Press*. We get the *Herald*."

Aunt Jane's chocolate cake was altogether successful, particularly as Mrs. Falter acknowledged it was an occasion by piling ice-cream on each cake plate. Brook spooning it up lingeringly was happily and increasingly aware that the long lonely time and the uncertain beginning in yet another place were over at last.

## 2

T HERE was the gradual slipping into another whole new set of things.

The choice of new wallpaper. *The rosebuds are such a baby pattern, Mother.* The new wallpaper was soft yellow with a narrow silver-gray stripe banishing the baby rosebud walls. Packing up of books and games and all the familiar toys she hadn't looked at for years, but suffering a small pang nevertheless at seeing them disappear into the Children's Appeal carton. There was graduation from the South Ebury Elementary School and after a summer of feeling that childhood lay in the remote past, the first meek Freshman day at South Ebury High School. There was the unbelievable invitation to join the Clay Club and there was the discovery in her father's library of the short stories of H. G. Wells.

And a more subtle part of growth. Her own body's changing and lengthening and becoming young-girlishly shapely and slender. One day—but you could never tell what day—it had been round and childish and another day it was as if that round childish body had belonged to someone else, for her own had become slim and longlegged.

It was true for Tom, too, for there was an end to mechanical earsplitting toys and the end of pretending to be a machine gun and at the same time the mowed-down object of its fire. An end to the noises of agonizing sudden death and destruction and of being a siren on an ambulance. And Tom's voice, a while later, was altogether undependable but emerged finally as a pleasant deep-toned human voice. Tom, even in the summer before he entered Queens College, was already referred to as a college man by their father.

Yet, with all the changes, there were many long hours left unaccounted for. Then Brush, the shepherd, could be taken for a long walk and Brook could idly think of nothing at all or pleasantly daydream and keep herself from thinking of any troublesome thing, being able to shut out the one troublesome thing while she walked with Brush, who when he was tired sat down immovably and laid his head on

his two thick front paws while he watched this behavior's effect.

The one troublesome thing. It could be said in three words, as she had heard it said so many times, by so many people. Chiefly the words had been overheard, sometimes whispered. *Sam Falter drinks. Sam Falter's drinking.*

The changes went on. Even Brush had grown up out of the lying-down puppy stage, only that one thing did not change. Only that one troublesome thing.

A day in October, four months after Brook was seventeen. Half-awake she heard the sounds of their house beginning this day. Slap of the screen door as Brush and the cats were let out. Then Tom running downstairs to breakfast. No, he was going down another set of stairs. For something forgotten in the game room. It was something she and Tom had long ago sagely observed that wherever you happened to be in their house you always needed something from another floor. You were lucky if it didn't turn up two floors away.

Their house was set squarely into Winterside Hill. On Winterside Drive you came in on the game room and went upstairs to the dining room and kitchen,

walking upstairs again to the bedrooms on the third floor. But from the back of the house, there were only two floors with the downstairs entrance into the kitchen.

The clock struck the half-hour, and Brook began to hurry into her clothing. There was a bit of Math that needed a second look. She searched for the textbook and laid it flat on her desk and brushed her hair while she studied the page. Her father, on the way down to breakfast, knocked at her door passing by. Three sharp taps. "Wake up, Brook, if you want the pleasure of my company."

"I'm up, and I do, Dad."

She took the Math along with her to breakfast. Tom left in a hurry, but her father waited for her and walked her half-way to school. They looked back at the end of Winterside Drive to wave at her mother who stood at the window. From this distance her face looked young and her eyes smiled at them. Her mother lifted her hand to wave, and her hand too seemed small and young. It was a gray-and-gold day, pale sunlight breaking through massed cumulus clouds. Cool and broodingly still, but the leaves had not yet begun to turn.

The hours of the day merged into one. In the stillness of the October morning Brook listened dis-

tantly to recitations and lectures while thoughts of her mother waving to them, of the walk with her father this morning, of Tom, flowed through her mind. They made a friendly familiar pattern enclosed in the pleasant promise of more good things to come. This afternoon there would be the Inquirers' meeting.

Dr. Marcella Davitt's Inquirers met alternate Wednesdays. On these afternoons she led them, willing as lambs, up beckoning slopes of discovery.

"You are able to think and you are young," she told them, "and you are able to learn. Soon, I am afraid, you will be looking backward, but at the moment you can look forward *and* backward and it is a wonderful, golden time." It was un-sentimentally said and they recognized its simple obvious truth and felt as if, secretly, they wore long young wings, just as Dr. Davitt meant them to feel.

Dr. Davitt wandered happily from the early Naturalists to Proper and Expanded Chest Breathing in these Wednesday afternoons. From Sophocles to beluga whales and mutations in the fruit fly. The changes were most abrupt and unforeseen and one could find oneself whisked out of the Ice Age and into the steaming jungles of the Amazon in a single sentence.

Or when everyone was at last properly breathing after living through childhood and almost all of adolescence without having done so, Dr. Davitt turned, as this afternoon, from both Naturalists and Proper Breathing.

"How many," Dr. Davitt's unhurried voice asked them amiably, "have seen a sunrise? I mean, let us say, within the last month or so."

There was an abyss of silence out of which Helen Vesey's hand was seen to rise.

Many of the older members felt it had been a mistake to allow the Freshmen into Dr. Davitt's inner circle, for their young minds were wont to wander. But Brook, among others, had voted for them to be allowed in. Now Helen Vesey's thin hand was in the air.

"Yes," Dr. Davitt said, "briefly tell us how it came about and how you felt. In your own words."

Helen stood with her hands behind her back. Brook, seated in back of her, could see Helen's hands twisting nervously, the fingers locking beyond any apparent possibility of ever unlocking. Helen concentrated upon her own feelings in her own words.

"Well," she said, "last week my brother and I did week-end shopping and when we got to the top of Maybury Hill where you get a wonderful view we

had a flat and it took so long fixing it we saw the sun set. And it was a wonderful sight."

There was a furrowing of brows, especially among those who had voted against the Freshmen coming in. Then Dr. Davitt, taking great pains to be patient, said, "Indeed it *is* wonderful, Helen. But I thought it was a sunrise you had seen."

Helen stubbornly shook her head and Dr. Davitt asked, "But is there no one here who has seen a sunrise recently? I want you to know that hushed experience," Dr. Davitt went on.

There were ill-suppressed groans, for although previous assignments had meant hurrying to encyclopedias, none had required getting up with the birds.

*A hushed experience.* The sound of it caught Brook's fancy. She could not remember ever having seen a sunrise. She thought about it as she stood waiting for Sue to gather up her books and belongings. To see a sunrise would be to share an experience with those other early Naturalists of Dr. Davitt's. Leonardo da Vinci, for example. His mind had been a particularly inquiring one.

Sue today was burdened with many loose objects, and as she stood up, there was the familiar clatter of things falling.

Walter Teal, senior, stooped and retrieved an angular package that looked as if a rock had been carefully wrapped and tied with pink ribbon.

"It's a great pity to undo this," Sue said, "but I think you ought to see it. In a way, it's educational."

The ribbon and wrappings came off and revealed a petrified baby shoe. Sue held it up an instant as if it were a lecturer's exhibit and studied their reactions.

Brook regarded it with amusement and Walter said, "How dear and sweet. Is it your own darling baby shoe, Sue?"

"It is," she said. "Cast in real bronze. Grandma is getting it for her birthday. Actually *asked* for it. The bad taste that runs in the family frightens me."

"Make every effort to live it down," Walter suggested.

Brook remembered the look of Sue's room that Sue herself had painted and decorated against all opposition. The colors in it lived happily together and were endlessly admired by Brook.

"You don't have to worry a bit," Brook said, as they walked out together.

They stopped in wonder at the main gate where other Inquirers stood in small talkative groups.

"Why, it's snowing," Sue said.

"Is it?" They were, all three, just as delighted as the Freshmen.

"Coming our way, Brook?" Walter asked.

Brook shook her head. "Not today. I think I'll go by for Tom at the *Press*. I love to walk in this."

GREAT lazy feather-flakes came sailing down and vanished as they touched substance. They left so thin a mist that only footprints were wet on the pavements. Brook, leaving Sue and Walter, felt the light touch of the early October snow on her face and on her eyelashes and tilted her face upward. A little of the wetness clung to her neck and its sudden cold discomfort woke a vague uneasiness in her.

She shook her head partly to shake off the clinging flakes, partly to dispel what caused the uneasiness. For of course she recognized its source. Rain or wet snow could always bring it to her. It began with that long-remembered driving rain.

She had been very young, perhaps four or five, and there was a fireplace before which they talked,

some long ago fireplace of their early wanderings.

Her mother said, inclining her head, "It's raining hard. Listen to the high wind."

They all listened and she put her head in her mother's lap. Uncle Henry stood leaning against the fireplace. He was cross and impatient as he always seemed to Brook in those days and he said, hurrying his words, "*It's always fair weather when good fellows get together.* I might as well go. It's late so there'd be no use talking to Sam tonight. If memory serves, he'll probably be in no condition to talk business."

She had been sleepily looking at the fire and the words meant nothing to her but she felt her mother's body stiffen and though her eyes were half-shut she saw the quick gesture her mother made toward Uncle Henry. She thought over the words Uncle Henry had said and also remembered the little rhyme, and lay awake waiting for his vague puzzling threat to be fulfilled.

Her mother put her to bed and long afterward he came home. First she had been frightened and wide-awake hearing the stumbling heavy steps, the noisy, thickened talk. Then there had been strained silence. Heart pounding, she leaned on her elbow, listening. Across the hall Tommy was fast asleep through it all.

It might have been the first time. She did not remember its ever happening before then. And Uncle Henry had known it would happen. How had he known she had wondered. She loved snow and rain but often its fresh wetness woke again that long ago evening and night.

She hoped it was not too late to catch Tom. He could quickly put an end to her uneasiness, send it flying. She hurried on her way to the *Press* office. It was busy and cheerful and its humming activity and warmth and the sound of the printing press rhythmically thumping added to the cheer.

As she came into the anteroom from outdoors she saw the door was open to the press room. Tom with his coat half-on was studying a piece of copy. He was as absorbed now by the mechanics of printing and by the writing of a good story and composing a good headline as he had been absorbed by trees-into-newspapers at seven. He had demanded and got from his father the maximum experience that could be had second-hand and now he had a job of his own and was paid for it and Mr. Willey had already asked him to come on the paper when he was through with college in June.

Brook slipped into the visitor's chair, straight-backed golden oak, smelling of lemon-oil polish and

as uncomfortable as it looked, and sat waiting for Tom to finish with his piece of copy and put on the rest of his coat. Meanwhile she looked at her own shadowy reflection in the glassed-in bulletin board. Under the place where the announcement said, "Come to a Turkey Supper on Wednesday Nite," there was a dark space that gave back a fairly accurate image. She stared at herself in dismay seeing her hair in a tangle where it had softly waved over her forehead in the morning. And the caught-up hair in the back looked from the small view she could get of it like nothing so much as a pony's tangled tail negligently tied with a wide black ribbon. She hastily pushed up her hair with both hands and, not to be too disappointed with the effect of this casual hair-combing, looked elsewhere.

Her features Brook privately considered too indefinite, although most people said they were delicate. Brook believed she should have been given a better-shaped set, as definite as Tom's, for instance. One had to admit that her eyes were nice, however, wide-open, very dark. Intense, Brook thought, might be the word for them.

It had stopped snowing as they came out of doors together. She took a deep breath of the cool still-moist air and set the pace for the homeward walk,

knowing that once Tom was allowed to set his own he would never let a walking partner get a relaxed breath.

"Frankly, the *Press* could stand a bit of expansion," Tom said. "Just now we specialize in gossip. Or twaddle, as Dad rightfully calls it. Why anyone would bother to read said twaddle, I don't know, particularly as the *Press* could be packed with first-rate stuff."

"Did you offer to write some first-rate stuff and get turned down?"

Tom looked away to the invisible horizon. "I suggested a fairly original feature."

"Mr. Willey prefers twaddle," Brook said.

"Oh, absolutely."

"What did you suggest?"

"A page of news in science. Science news in brief gathered from all over the world. There's a real basis for uniting people by making common ground in science against disease, for instance. Sharing scientific gains in every field. If you could have that kind of exchange of ideas we'd make a long step toward progress and against war. Print the things that bring people together. And what's more, bring all that to every little paper in every little community like ours."

"Sounds like quite a bit for one feature. Anyway, he turned you down."

"Oh, yes," Tom said pleasantly, "but I'm going to keep asking. Perhaps one day he'll see things my way. The way of progress, Fellow Citizens."

He was cheering her up already. His coloring was fair and his light hair and gray eyes were undeniably cheerful-looking in themselves. He seemed to her altogether sure of himself. At twenty he easily cleared the six-foot mark and their mother said their family grew to the time they were twenty-one. Brook liked to see passers-by glance at him a second time and with interest, just as they were doing now.

Brook wheeled round to take another look into the South Ebury Style Shop window as they passed by. Corduroy velvet ballerina skirts in bright colors and matching sweaters. Very nice they were, she thought, especially the ones in aqua.

Tom came back a step toward her. "Let's hurry. I almost forgot I asked Philip to come in. Chess game and supper."

"Philip? Philip C.?" She checked herself and made the utmost attempt to be offhand. Of the two Philips that Tom knew Philip C. was the one that mattered.

Philip Cantrell worked on the *Press*, too, besides going to school with Tom, but as some of his classes

were late afternoon ones he had managed to have some hours to spare mornings for the paper, so that while Tom and Philip did not see each other daily at the *Press* they carried on the same work and left terse or interminable memorandums for each other and had a great deal to talk over. In the meantime it changed everything for Brook to have Philip C. come for supper.

"Come on," Tom repeated.

She tried to quicken her pace that was already top speed. "Mother can easily keep him amused," Brook said, sounding hollow to herself, "or he can look at a book or entertain the kitten. Tom, perhaps you'd offer to set the table and let him help you so I can have a minute to get set. Not that it's necessary," she added.

Tom looked sideways at her. "Not that it's even remotely necessary," he said. "Especially all that ink around your chin is becoming. Like a dignified Van Dyke."

"An irresistible Van Dyke," she said, rubbing vigorously with her hand.

"Now that it's well rubbed in," Tom said, "it's a singularly interesting sight *and* weirdly repulsive."

She smiled and turned toward him. "I don't care

how repulsive it is provided it's weirdly. Tom, Dr. Davitt wants us to see the dawn—the sunrise.”

“What about the Deep Breathing? Have you stopped breathing?”

“I thought you’d come with me up Maybury Hill to watch the sun come up tomorrow.”

“Any other time but tomorrow. And the day after. And the day after that. Next week, too.”

“Well, I was just thinking of your missing a hushed beautiful experience. Besides, you’ve got the alarm clock and I’d have to borrow it and then set it back for you for later on. I always get into deep trouble with that clock. It stops running after I touch it.”

“I’ll wake you,” Tom offered, “if you want me to.”

“All right. Though it would have been fun to go up and sit on Maybury Hill and watch the sun come up. Like Galileo.”

“Did he sit on Maybury Hill? How about Philip C.? Perhaps he can be interested.”

“Please don’t suggest it.” She was genuinely alarmed. “But if you wake me and I go by myself you’ll have your conscience hurting all day thinking of me trudging up alone. And it’s always darkest before dawn, they say, and there I go, a lonely little

figure in the dark plodding up Maybury Hill waiting for the sunrise."

"I hear low muttering sounds of discontent," Tom said. "What about asking Sue along, then?"

"No. Dr. Davitt wants us to go alone. The experience has to be one's own. Related in one's own words."

"In that case what would I be, an unseen presence like the wild west wind?"

"You wouldn't bother me in the least. You'd just be there for company. Will you?"

He nodded agreeably. "I don't mind."

She was eagerly looking forward to it. Tom and she would embark on an adventure before the break of day exactly like the early naturalists and experimenters, like Leonardo da Vinci whose mind too was an inquiring one.

"Put on the brakes," Brook said, as they came sweeping up the walk to the house, but it was unnecessary caution for Tom opened the door an inch at a time. They stepped gingerly inside. Their friends, too, had long ago learned to enter the Falter household in this way for no cat or dog that belonged to the Falters had ever been educated to the folly of lurking near the door. Invariably there were squeals of rage and pain when furry toes were inadvertently

stepped on. The Menagerie consisted of Brush, the shepherd, and Belladonna, "a poorly domesticated smallish tiger," as Sam Falter described her, and varying numbers of Bella's offspring. At the moment there was only Bodoni Bold in the family group. Bodoni was a blackfaced kitten named by Tom out of fondness for type-face names but also for Bodoni's reckless aggressiveness. Now the Menagerie wove about their feet as Brook and Tommy came in.

"Greetings to all," Brook called from the bottom of the stairs, "here we are."

Philip leaned over the banister. "Make yourselves at home," he said.

"Why, if it isn't Philip," she said, burying her chin in her chest and darting by him on the way upstairs to wash.

The tablecloth was spread, she noticed, as she went by the dining room, and the flowers off to one end of the table but no plates were set out. Better come down at once after rearranging her face somewhat.

"Mother," she called down from the bathroom, "I'll give you a hand as soon as I've washed." She stared at herself in the mirror. There was no vestige of ink and she had rubbed a red place on her chin at Tommy's instigation. She was under the shower

before she remembered her cap. Never mind. She was determined to be unruffled.

In a few minutes she was combing her wet hair severely back and it lay black and shining. She examined her face critically and with half-grudging approval saw her eyes were bright and her skin fresh and clear. Was there a way, she wondered, to look poised and self-possessed when all the while you hung on Philip's words and your whole heart went into hoping he would once think of you as someone other than Tom Falter's little sister?

She hastily slipped into her red wool dress and pinned the tiny gold heart-shaped outline on the right-hand scallop of the collar. The dress still fit beautifully, though it was a bit short compared with the newest things.

Tom and Philip were busy with the chessmen when Brook heard her mother say, "You're not going to involve yourselves in a new game, I hope, when everything is at the point of being ready. I think Brook's on her way down, too."

"We're just finishing up," Tom called back.

Thus underlined, Brook moved in leisurely fashion down the stairs, not a bit hurried, and head held high and well-poised and sure of herself. And thus holding her head high and feeling well poised,

tripped on the last step but one and teetered dangerously, clutching the stair-rail too late. She came to rest seated on the floor.

Philip and Tom began to get up from their chairs, then seeing her intact, settled back once more and returned to the game. Brook scrambled to her feet saying, "I hope you didn't hurt yourself, Brook." And changing her voice to a light airy one, "Oh, no, thank you, but it's kind of you to be so unusually solicitous."

"I was about to ask but I thought it would be advisable to overlook the whole thing." Philip was laughing at her but she did not resent it in the least and began to laugh too.

Rubbing her side and leg that ached almost as much as her fractured dignity, she said, "It'll take a bit of practicing to overlook this, but I am trying."

Philip was taking a long time planning his end-game and Tom was distrustfully watching him while Brook sat quietly on the bottom step thinking it was a sweet time of day with the lights on and the warmth of their house shutting out the late autumn chill. The Menagerie was giving the right cosy note to it, too, lying before the fire that Tom had laid so expertly. As always the kitten preferred snuggling into Brush's neck rather than its own mother's inade-

quately short fur. In the moment of quiet she heard the sound of something steaming on the stove and over that sound the ticking of the huge mechanism of their clock. Listening to it as Philip and Tom sat taken up with their game, it seemed measured and comfortable. She heard the clicking sound before it struck and then slowly and majestically, seven strikes. It was later than she thought.

Tiny ringing of an alarm quickly shut off. Tiny alarm that had so often broken into just such pleasant flowing of time. It had begun so far back as to be recalled only as a firelit place somewhere, with driving rain outside, and the sound of their voices and Uncle Henry's words, *It's always fair weather when good fellows get together.*

"I wish we had a fireplace that worked," Philip said. "We have a situation where there's smoke without fire."

"This smokes too," Brook said, running away from her thoughts toward Philip, "when the wind's going the wrong way."

"All the same, I see a fire," Philip said. "I'm losing a man a minute," he added stoically.

She should really be using this time for lesson assignments, she supposed, but put away the thought. Not now. Then, hearing her mother beginning to

remove the plates from the cupboard, Brook called up, "Need me, Mother?"

"All right, dear, come along, we're almost ready."

"Excuse me," Brook said, beginning to run upstairs.

"Be careful," Tommy called after her, "not to fall backward."

"Ninety percent of the accidents are in the home," said Philip.

She lifted her head and tried looking stonily downward at them but stood still for the time needed to do so and held on to the stair-rail besides.

She took from the shelf five dinner plates. Her mother, glancing at them, said, "No, not five tonight, Brook. Dad's delayed. Staff meeting, I think."

*Oh, just let it be late.*

Her mother looked at her and smiled, "You look sweet," but the uneasiness Brook felt earlier now fleetingly returned.

Brook went round to straighten meticulously the knives and forks and added a demitasse spoon beside her mother's setting. The late jewel-like zinnias were still brightly blooming. She set the bowl of them back in the center of the table.

"Imagine, Mother, zinnias and a snowfall."

"I hope it isn't the end of them."

"They're darlings," Brook said, trying to turn up their heads that perversely hung down.

Her mother came into the dining room and Brook intercepted the glance that was going to the clock. "We can plant twice as many early next spring. Perhaps in a little border at the front too. Would that be too fussy, I wonder, to have a zinnia border in the front?"

"Not at all. Giant ones for the back and little ones massed in front."

Her mother's eyes had rested a moment upon the clock. Her thoughts were traveling the same well-worn road as her own. Brook's eyes fixed themselves upon the bowl of bright flowers and deliberately did not look at her mother's left hand that smoothed over and over a tiny wrinkle in the white cloth on the table.

Through all her thoughts and over them, there remained the one persisting thought, let it only be late. Let it not be the other.

It was a trick like juggling, this being able to run two thoughts beside each other. She could do it easily. Think of one thing and talk of another. Enter into conversation with one small part of her mind and, while talking, think of something alto-

gether different. Listening to Tom and Philip now, even talking to them at the expected moments when asked for a definite answer, and following a thread that led elsewhere. Not that there were many gaps in the talk as they sat round the table.

"We could, I suppose, run short of scientific news. It might happen one week," Philip said. They were laying the plans for a newspaper that showed little resemblance to the *Press*.

"We'd have to invent some," Tom said, "just as we'd have to fill in if ever we're faced with a blank page an hour before press time."

"That which is called Editor's Nightmare," Philip said. "How do we handle it?"

"I cut the problem in two by turning half of it over to you, naturally."

"Naturally," said Philip unenthusiastically. Then brightening, "For my half page I'd go into the possibilities of a Thought Camera I've been considering."

Mrs. Falter asked with interest, "Does it run on the same principle as a lie detector?"

"It will revolutionize living, Mrs. Falter. The Thought Machine is the next step in progress. It photographs the process of thinking and translates it upon a screen known as the Visualizer." Philip was

improvising rapidly and pleased with results. "Think of Professor Evers with a concealed Thought Camera in the Math room, Tom. For half an hour there'd be dull crackling noises. No image. He'd conclude the machine was out of fix."

"Not Evers. He's been suspecting nothing goes on all along. He'd only be corroborated."

The half-listening was part of her. As long as Brook could remember she could never throw herself entirely into something as Tom could so readily do. There was always part of her standing guard.

A wide expanse of lawn and she was lying on her stomach with her head propped up in her hands. There were the mingled smells of moist warm earth and cut grass in sunshine. The light breeze stirred the branches and then there was a more violent stirring and Tommy's face appeared high above in the blue spruce. She had to laugh at Tommy's imitating a monkey up in the blue spruce.

Aunt Marian sat in the swing with Uncle Henry. She said, "*Elle est très gaie* considering all that's been going on at home." Brook had not found it hard even then to guess at the meaning of the simple little phrase and knew it was meant for her and her laughing aloud at Tommy. But Aunt Marian couldn't have known how far from happy she was, thinking

of her mother's white face and the sound of their father's angry voice before they left in the morning.

"The thought processes are recorded on a graph for any twenty-four hour period. One competent person translates on to the sound track. It's invaluable for testing public servants. The voters have a right to know the candidates' point of view. For instance, has the candidate his mind on the greatest good for the greatest number for, say, one-third of the time? That's the minimum allowed. Or just what is he wondering about? Poetry, perhaps? Horseracing? In this way, ladies and gentlemen, we are able to photograph fitness for office."

"But this competent person—is he utterly dependable? Wouldn't it be better to work out complete mechanical control?" Mrs. Falter said and looked seriously at Philip.

Philip considered this and was inclined to agree. "Like bread wrapped on the assembly line, untouched by human hands. You're right, Mrs. Falter. In the meantime we'll look around for a trustworthy administrator to watch the thoughts translate themselves into pictures and explain the whole thing on the sound track. Simple, isn't it?"

"No harder to understand than the speeches enclosed in balloons in the comics," Brook explained.

"Except scientifically arrived at by the Cantrell test."

"For your quick mind, Brook, you are definitely to be Administrator No. I. Perhaps later promoted to be Science Editor."

"Much later," Tom said, as Brook did not show the proper bowled-over gratitude at this appointment.

Of course the luck couldn't last forever. And sooner or later—But not tonight. Not tonight when Philip was at the very beginning of noticing her. Every time Tom gave him no particular cause for worry on the chessboard and all through dinner, she thought he glanced appreciatively at her. The dinner had gone so smoothly, too, with their plans for their newspaper and Philip's including her in his imaginative flights. All at once she pulled up short, trying to still her fears. What is there to go on? Nothing, nothing at all. Only a habit, a long-accustomed habit. Only the alert look on her mother's face whenever there was the sound of a car's slowing up, and her mother's eyes unconsciously moving to the clock. And there had been the early snowfall. Yes, the snowfall had begun her thinking of it. She had almost forgotten it.

Tom, over dessert, as though in some subtle way her fear had been communicated, said abruptly, "By

the way, Philip, would you take a ride out with me to see a stock opening? It's over in Haverhill. I have some *Press* tickets. A play called *Romeo and Juliet*. Playwright by the name of Shakespeare. William Shakespeare. Ever hear of him?"

"What's the name again?" said Philip.

Brook sighed a long happy inward sigh. Thank you, Tom, from the bottom of my heart for taking Philip away at a critical moment or what might become one.

Philip looked toward Brook and asked, "All of us going?"

"No, just you and I, Philip."

"But if there aren't three tickets we could buy one for me and have Brook sit with us? I guess Mrs. Falter wouldn't consider joining the party," he added.

"Thank you, no, Philip." But her mother was pleased, nevertheless, with the invitation, Brook could see.

"Brook has orders to get up before sunrise tomorrow," Tom said. "Dr. Davitt's marching orders."

Philip looked inclined to debate the point and Tommy took charge, beginning firmly to move Philip out. "We've got to hurry," he said.

They were gone at last and she began to help her

mother take the supper things from the table. They were both preoccupied as they talked and worked in the kitchen and did not look at each other. Once meeting squarely, they smiled, and Brook felt it was at least half in relief at being left to themselves.

It occurred to her that her mother had been maneuvering these situations for a long time, more years than Brook knew. Now she, herself, was taking over, joining the conspiracy.

She was still awake when she heard Tommy come home. And long after Tommy had gone to sleep, after a moment of held breath, hearing the taxi draw up to the curb, she knew her fears had been in vain. His step was firm and steady as he went up the stairs. All was well, this time. Her mind and body relaxed at once, swiftly. The worry dropped away, the tightening worry dropped away and plummeted down, down out of mind.

DIMLY, in sleep, Brook heard the approaching footsteps. She made an enormous effort to recapture what seemed a long-ago and vanished eagerness to see the sun come up this morning. And could not. *I'll just have to send Tommy away . . . some other morning . . . when I've had a long sleep . . .* But it wasn't Tom. It seemed incredible that she should recognize the footsteps after so long. It had been four years ago, at least, that Aunt Jane had come to take care of them, when she and Tommy both had scarlet fever. She was wideawake at once and sat up to face Aunt Jane. It was broad daylight.

"Is everything all right?" she asked, aware that it could not possibly be with Aunt Jane there early in the morning. "Is—Dad—?"

Jane Sutherland came toward her slowly and sat

beside her bed on the gingham-covered rocker. She was a tall woman and her face had always seemed to Brook to be sunny, no matter what was happening, yet for a moment Brook saw her as drawn down into herself and quite small, and there was a look of undeniable misery on her face.

She did not question Aunt Jane, afraid now to do so, yet having to know. She sat there in her bed and the small fear that began in her toes, the old inescapable knowledge and warning of bad news to come—all of it was with her again. The small fear that began in her toes began to run up and up into her legs and up her spine and into her hands making everything quite numb-feeling and preventing her from moving except stiffly.

Aunt Jane said, "Would you like me to stay in here while you dress? Do you want me to get you something out of the dresser?"

She got out of bed and was waiting for Aunt Jane to tell her, knowing Aunt Jane was searching for words, for the right words, and all the time Brook was trying to remember how he had walked upstairs. She was certain he had walked up firmly and steadily. She could not have been mistaken. Then a terrible sweeping thought caught her up and she turned sharply to Aunt Jane.

"Is it—Mother?" She stood there with her back against the tall chest of drawers and her arms in back of her against the drawer handles clinging to them for support and Aunt Jane stood too, near the rocker, and looked at her desperately, and then nodded.

"It happened at four this morning. 'Don't wake the children,' she said. 'It isn't anything.' But your father called Dr. Burchall and sent Tommy for me. She was gone before I came. It was her poor tired heart."

No matter how much Brook wanted to remember what happened after that she could not. Because there was only the clear memory of that little while with Aunt Jane. Because all the rest was a kaleidoscope that, unlike all others, did not have its pattern neatly repeated and mirrored. It was instead a tangle of sights and sounds and bits of conversation and, beneath it all, the sense of disbelief.

Hearing someone say, *Dearest Brook, you know how sorry we are for you*, she had looked up in surprise. She hadn't thought at all about how sorry they were, not about that part of it, yet that it involved others, too. There was only Tom's white set face and Dad's intent staring, as if he were trying to remember something and could not.

There was that day of rain. was it a day later or

was it two days? Their own three stood together, Dad at one side of her, towering, broad-shouldered, his handsome head bare, and Tom on the other. That would be the Burial Service, the dull-sounding words, and Aunt Marian opening her umbrella as the first few drops came down.

It appeared to be a signal for other umbrellas to open and then Uncle Henry frowned as he turned about him, thin and tall and commanding. The umbrellas that were being put up were all, including Aunt Marian's, hastily taken down again, rain or no rain, and it was extremely funny somehow. She looked at Uncle Henry and she must have been smiling because Uncle Henry looked at her with something like horror on his face.

And all the time inside of her the numbness, the sinking-down numbness. Numb and cold and unfeeling and you kept glancing around, looking for someone until you remembered she could not be standing beside you if she were there, inside that. But you could not call it by its name and you stood there being cold and numb and forgetting she could not be beside you and glancing round, anyway, out of habit, for one small glimpse of her.

Jane Sutherland was there too. On the outer fringe beside another of her patients in the family.

Uncle Walt was her patient but there was nothing wrong with him except that one thing. Now Brook was practicing an old trick again, hearing two things at once. She could clearly hear Uncle Walt saying to Aunt Jane, "You see, Mrs. Sutherland, my brother'd be the logical one to go first were it not for the fact that he is extremely well preserved in alcohol." She was near him but he was raising his voice as if he were lecturing to a classroom. Aunt Jane looked down at the damp ground, pretending she hadn't heard. "Not that it isn't an old and dishonorable tradition with the Falters," Uncle Walt added. "Let's see now, Grandfather was definitely the bibulous type. Like Sam and myself. Father, I admit, was the gentleman. Stern, righteous, much holier-than-thou. Not thou, in particular, Mrs. Sutherland, but thou in general. Still he liked to take a nip or two more than was good for him, as Mama used to say confidentially. What's your opinion of this whole set-up, Mrs. Sutherland?"

Aunt Marian turned to Uncle Henry and shook her head vigorously. "Never heard anything like it. At his brother's wife's funeral. The man's impossible. I want you to speak to him, Henry. The least he could do would be to stay away."

Uncle Henry scowled his terrible scowl upon his

wife, too, and she was silent, but there were other small whispers about Uncle Walt. She heard them while she heard the drip of rain and saw the new earth that was slowly becoming wet at the top and then the wet seeping down and darkening the sides of the heap.

Tom's shoulder was suddenly leaning on hers, but perhaps it was she leaning on Tom. Anyway there was his shoulder for support and she swayed a little bit toward him and her father took her whole hand inside his own as he used to, long ago, when she had been riding in a train for a while. It had helped stop the seasick feeling when he held her hand tightly. Now he stood still and tall and lonely-looking, holding her hand tightly.

After that day the house had become a forlorn and unendurably lonely place, despite the fact that Jane Sutherland came early in the morning each day and stayed until after supper. All of Brook's own tasks about the house, even in her own room, Aunt Jane capably did for her. And Aunt Jane urged Brook to go out and see her friends as the weather was so fine, just the least nip of frost in the air, and perhaps look in at the Clay Club.

"You make such nice little animals, Brook. I would

like to see you really get busy on one. Couldn't you try?"

Aunt Jane did all the shopping and never troubled Brook to pick up some forgotten trifle or other. Aunt Jane set the table and cleared the table and would not let Brook help with the dishes.

Brook did leave the house afternoons, but it wasn't to go to the Clay Club. She walked instead, in a loitering sort of way, down toward Maybury, and along the edge of Parkway and on the way back when the muscles of her legs had begun to ache, after coming the long way round, she usually sat with her chin in her hand beside Frog Pond on the low stone bench.

As for Tom, he was taking Aunt Jane's advice and was busy doing something. He perpetually clattered away on the typewriter in his room and asked for and got an extra afternoon hour at the *Press*, besides. Sometimes Brook imagined he had twinges of remorse about her and asked her to come by at the *Press* so they could walk home together. But both times she stopped for him the walks home had been not at all like their old walks.

"Your mother seemed very tired," Dr. Burchall had said. "Very tired and unwilling to fight. It's a great shock to all of us." Then he had added, "Her

hopes for you, Brook, were very high, and for your brother."

Sitting at the side of Frog Pond today, Brook thought of Dr. Burchall's long lean face as he had told her that. And remembered a long-ago talk of Dr. Davitt about dominant qualities in a family of white rabbits. Suppose, Brook thought idly, one considered the Falters in terms of *their* dominant qualities.

Were a scientist to observe the Falters would he at once recognize the Falter quality? ". . . Unwilling to fight," as Dr. Burchall had said. Nor could their father fight it off, whatever it was that drove him so hard.

So it came to her and to Tom doubly, this running-away quality. But if you knew about it in time, couldn't it all be changed? Couldn't one pretend to have what courage it needed, at least, not to run away? Not do the expected thing? The expected Falter thing. Borrow courage somewhere. A little would do—a cupful.

Brook stood up and began walking. All the apricot and gold had gone from the western sky, and it was leaden and gray. There was the smell of frost in the air and she felt better now, better in a way she could not explain, better, as if it did not take so much

effort to walk home, or perhaps her heart was lighter. Was that it? But how could it be, for nothing was changed?

Aunt Jane was the only one who was even slightly changed. These days Aunt Jane did not ask Brook where things were or what Brook would like for supper. Not any more. Aunt Jane told her what she ought to wear for changes in the weather and prepared their meals remembering what it was that Brook preferred.

In the late November twilight Brook walked home. All the lights were on in the houses and as she passed them the lights in the streets went on, too. Frosty and clear, with a brilliant starry sky overhead. She walked in a roundabout way so she could pass the Library. The Clay Club had its meetings in the Library and she could now see the preceding month's work. She walked to the exhibit case inside. Miss Easton waved her hand to her in greeting.

There was Elena Mori's blue monkey and the child's head in red clay that Walter was doing. They were both good. And the third piece was a leopard. There was no identifying card for this one but anyone could see it was Sue's work. More a leopard than a live leopard could ever be with its exaggerated great feet and low-slung body and the whip of the

tail curled to lash out—best of all was the head, ears erect and burning eyes. It had been fired in bright yellow and the black spots had been concentrated on head and shoulders. It seemed so thoroughly *honest*. It was odd that a person's own quality could shine right through his work, making itself clearly known. She stopped for a long time before the Clay Club exhibit.

One of these days she would take herself to the workshop and begin something new, some afternoon soon. It's the first time, she thought, the first time I've even wanted to come back.

She hurried out and, passing by, saw that the *Press* office was dark, so Tom had been and gone. She walked quickly and turned into Winterside Drive and saw at once the light in the window of the game room. Was Philip there with Tom, or was someone visiting them? They had hardly been down in that room since that other evening. She hurried home.

Brook opened the front door and carefully side-stepped Bodoni. From the hall she faced the two standing figures. She had interrupted them and Aunt Marian's face had not had time to compose itself.

"Hello," Brook said.

Aunt Marian seemed to brace herself and came

toward her and kissed her cheek but her face still wore an angry look. Aunt Jane nodded briefly and seemed abstracted, and displeased.

"Brook, dear, I've been patiently waiting for hours. You're looking thin, it seems to me."

"Why, I'm sure—" then knew intuitively it was a remark meant for Mrs. Sutherland and a reflection upon her care of their family. "I'm really not," she said. She took off her coat and put it over the arm of a chair and Aunt Jane took it up and folded it over her arm.

"I'll take this up with me. Excuse me," she said and left them together.

"Brook, I want to talk to you," Aunt Marian began to say the moment the door was closed behind Aunt Jane. Aunt Marian was making an enormous effort to talk in a controlled voice. It must really have been a fight. Brook had never seen Jane Sutherland look clearly upset before. She wondered what Aunt Marian could have been saying.

"I'm sorry I'm late. Have you seen Tom? He wasn't at the *Press* office when I came by. Isn't he at home?"

"Yes, he came in. I saw him for a moment. He gave me some trumped-up excuse and disappeared." Aunt Marian talked in an injured tone as if Tom

and Brook should have been on hand and waiting, whether or not they knew she was coming.

"It's about the future, Brook. Your future. Now that it's all over, you must frankly face what's ahead."

All over? Brook thought. But for me it's begun only today. Today I *know* it has happened. She looked closely at her aunt seeing her clear-cut profile and the bright yellow-gold of her hair. There was nothing indefinite about her, even the skin on her handsome face was tightly drawn over the bony structure. Her mother had said once that Aunt Marian's profile showed strength and Brook remembered her father's amused comment. "So does our stern and rockbound coast." She smiled faintly at the memory.

"I've come for a special reason, Brook," her aunt said and gave her an answering smile. "I want you first of all to know you haven't been deserted by your family. We've all been thinking of you and worrying over you, and Uncle Henry and I particularly want you to know how close we feel to you."

Brook was greatly surprised. To begin with there had never for a moment been the thought in her mind of having been deserted by Aunt Marian. And it did seem a little late to mention it, in any case, after nearly two months had gone by.

"You're past seventeen, aren't you, Brook? That means you've almost a year before you're old enough in the eyes of the courts to be on your own. Now, Brook, we think you ought to live with us. Uncle Henry and I offer our home to you exactly as if you were our daughter. Tom can manage. He tells me he'll be taking a job on the paper. Boys live their own lives, anyway. It's the only solution, Brook."

Far from being a solution it seemed to Brook to raise a hundred questions. "But, Aunt Marian," she began to say.

Aunt Marian hadn't quite finished and was not prepared to listen to Brook yet. "You'll have the right sort of clothes, for instance. You seem to wear sweaters and skirts exclusively." She looked critically at Brook's light cashmere sweater and wide-flared skirt, a costume that was a particular favorite of Brook's.

Aunt Marian went to the door and reassured herself about its being closed. She came back to the fireplace and looked away from Brook and then said, "All of this would break up, eventually, you know, once you were away from here. Will you, Brook? What do you think?" Aunt Marian had put away her air of authority.

"I'm sure—" Brook started to say.

"You'd better come with us," Aunt Marian said, not allowing her to finish what she obviously did not want to hear.

"Do you mean I couldn't manage here with Father and Tom?"

"I mean this—I must speak plainly to you, Brook, because I think you do *not* see how serious it is for you. I want to give you a home and Henry and I have talked about it and he sees it my way. For all the outside world it would be as if you were our daughter. You know, a girl of your age must first of all have a proper home. Ours is rather more than usually comfortable. Your friends will always be welcome. You know that is going to be very difficult here, especially now." She leaned toward Brook and tapped her shoulder. "That woman upstairs, I'm convinced, is trying to marry your father."

No doubt Aunt Marian meant it to be unpleasant and a shock but Brook hoped at least that her face wasn't showing the effect of her words. She stared at the pattern of the rug as Aunt Marian continued, "As I said, Tom will be working and taking care of himself and your father—well," she lifted her hand and made a quick gesture of dismissal. "Brook, you're too old to pretend. You know how often he

isn't himself. He won't know what to *do* about this woman. It'll be easy for her to talk herself into this marriage when he isn't—"

"You're wrong, Aunt Marian," Brook said quickly.

She seemed to have been waiting for the opening. "Listen to me, Brook. You're mistaken if you think I haven't known for many years. Your father is drinking up all the money he makes and running through whatever else he can put his hands on. Perhaps there are sober periods. Eventually he is going the way all the Falters have gone. Don't you see what has happened, Brook? Your mother had some money when she married him, a good deal of money. It's all gone, except for a little you'll have one day, you and your brother. Henry's taking care of that, you know, and also of the little quarterly amounts that still don't get into your father's hands. I want you with us for your own good. So you won't be here when finally Sam Falter is left without a penny and can't count on the quarterly payments and when she'll discover—" she looked toward upstairs, "he isn't the rich man she thought he was. I want you with me so you'll be able to live in a finer atmosphere."

"I'd never leave them," Brook said. "And you're wrong about Mrs. Sutherland. We wouldn't know

what we'd do without her all these weeks." She tried very hard to put conviction into her words.

Aunt Marian raised her eyebrows. "But she *means* you not to know what to do without her. She's in control now. And is determined to go on being in control. I don't want you to decide on the moment anyway. I'm not quite ready for you at home. But I do want you to think it over carefully. Write me when you are ready to come. You know, Brook, the only person who made this a home is gone. Don't let too much time go by. Don't slip into thinking this is good enough when it isn't. There'll be young men calling on you soon. Surely you wouldn't want them to see your father—" Aunt Marian looked at Brook's face and brought her speech to an abrupt halt.

Because this was the fear that loomed largest, whenever she thought of Philip, it was too much to have Aunt Marian put into words. It was a thought you had and did not admit you had. You did not admit it even to yourself and you wondered if anyone on earth had ever had this particular fear. And it was obvious to Aunt Marian. All of it was obvious to her. Perhaps she even knew about Philip.

"Think about it, Brook. I'm offering you my home with every one of its advantages. You need not think

of it as mine, but as yours too." Aunt Marian began to pull on her gloves. There was a little nervous flutter of eyelid that Brook noticed whenever Aunt Marian was being forceful. Now her eyelid was fluttering and the set of her mouth was determined. "I must leave now. I feel we've had a heart-to-heart talk, anyway. Good-by, Brook dear." She bent to kiss her and Brook stood still and half-shut her eyes.

Aunt Marian walked to the outer door and Brook walked after her, wondering if she really meant to leave without saying good-by to Aunt Jane, and then held the door for her since she made no move toward returning. Brook waved to her as she turned from the walk into the street.

As she went upstairs, she did not glance into the kitchen where Aunt Jane was beginning their evening meal. In her own room Brook sat on the edge of her bed and stared at the back of the worn chair where Bella, when no one was looking, sharpened her claws. Then Brook went to her desk and took out her lesson assignment book and studied her notes.

Four problems in Math and a chapter of English History, Part II, and Biology, and for Dr. Davitt's group next Wednesday her note said, *Observe some everyday miracles. Prepare to discuss.*

She laid out all the books she would need for

reference, concentrating a moment on everyday miracles and could remember only Sue's flatly made statement that one everyday miracle was turning in a daily French translation.

The books lay before her and she opened one. Its white pages reflected the lamplight, white and blank, as if there were no words written there. *You know*, of all Aunt Marian had said this was the clearest in her memory, *the only person who made this a home is gone*. It was true. As if her mother had been the strong, irresistible magnet that drew them together. Perhaps now that she was gone they would go off, each in a different direction. Tommy had already talked about hitching across the country next summer.

There was a knock at the door, a slowly repeated knock.

"May I come in, Brook?"

Brook opened the door and, for a moment, stood studying Jane Sutherland in the new light, the light that Aunt Marian had shed upon her. She was their friend and for a long time they would have been helpless without her, in the dazed, confused days that followed that early morning in October. But not a stepmother. Not her father's second wife. Because then, in a way, you accepted the idea that their

mother was not indispensable. What was the chilling word they had used during the war? *Expendable*.

When Dr. Davitt had discussed it together with the rest of the waste and stupidity and horror of war, the word had burned itself deep into her mind. How could anyone even have thought of it? As if a human being anytime, anywhere, could ever be expendable. And, as she stood hesitant, with these thoughts racing through her head, Jane Sutherland said, "I'd like to come in, Brook, and sit with you. May I?"

"Yes, do come in, Aunt Jane," she said while she thought, it isn't true. It's Aunt Marian's imagination at work. No one can take her place. No one could ever take her place. Not with me, not with Tom, and surely not with Dad. She had understood him so well and loved him more than enough to forgive him the countless heartbreaking times. "I'm not able to concentrate at all," Brook said.

Aunt Jane sat in the rocker and set down her knitting bag beside her and searched in it. "I've brought along all forty-eight motifs for the afghan. That makes two strips of twenty-four each. I'll try putting them together so you and I can have a look at the pattern. One person at work always seems to make others in the neighborhood get busy too."

It was true. As she looked over the French lesson,

the words assumed a relationship to each other. Brook began to write the translation and Aunt Jane sat there, under the lamp, joining the bright varicolored squares together.

Brook had written her fountain pen dry before she looked up again and all the time she worked over the French she put all her effort into keeping herself from thinking of Aunt Marian.

"Take a breather, Brook. Shall I bring some supper up here for you? Tom had his in his room, too, to save time. Tom's always saving time. He's working on something for the newspaper. There's fried chicken and I tried a peanut-bar cake from a recipe in a magazine."

"I could go down and get it myself."

"No, I'll get it, Brook. I rather enjoy a little break in the work every now and then."

It was plain that Aunt Jane was determined not to speak of her aunt's visit and what it was that had disturbed her. Brook felt almost as if she had to apologize for her aunt. It would be difficult for Aunt Jane to understand Aunt Marian.

Jane Sutherland had known her mother as a young bride, and had established her in her home. Brook could reconstruct those early years very well from all she had heard in occasional fragments of conversa-

tion. Aunt Jane had come again when Tommy was born and stayed with them for five years that time, until Brook herself was two. She had shared with her mother the heartbreak of those early days when her young husband's promising career had become a doubt, then a disappointment, when the furious storms had begun to show the tendency of Sam Falter.

There had been long calm months and then the tossing storm. Later the calm periods were shorter and Tommy and she were sent, during the bad times, from New York to Aunt Marian's and again and again to the small tidy suburban house of Jane Sutherland, a young widow then.

The visits away from home had begun to interfere with their school work, when there was a subtle change. Their father was the one to leave for short or long absences. "On a long assignment," their mother said, and both children accepted it and saw him come back days or weeks later, terribly shaken and ill. Each time Brook had repeated over and over to herself, *perhaps this time, this time is the last.*

Jane Sutherland had seen the changes come about through the years and knew her own and Tommy's utter loneliness when they were away from home—understood them both far better than Aunt Marian

ever could. It was unthinkable suddenly that Aunt Marian should offend Jane Sutherland, and be suspicious of her.

When Aunt Jane came back with Brook's supper and was at work again on the afghan and Brook had finished her supper, she said, "I suppose Aunt Marian told you why she came."

Aunt Jane nodded and looked at Brook and laid aside her work. "In a way. I think she did want to see how things are going." She glanced round the room with its bright touches of color and its beautifully polished floor. "She told me she wanted to take you away from this unwholesome environment." She said it seriously. "We had a long talk. And of course there was no reason for getting angry with her, as I did, because she asked for an accounting. I'd been keeping the accounts carefully. No reason at all. I'm really ashamed of myself."

But Brook knew Aunt Marian's manner and how easy it would be to resent what Tommy called her Imperious Air.

"I can't see how you could help that, Aunt Jane." Then she added quickly, "I'm not going to live with Aunt Marian."

Aunt Jane made no comment. She took up her work again and went on with it. Then she held up

the afghan. "There," she said. "Just as I thought it would be. As gay as flowers that bloom in the spring." She stood up and folded up the afghan slowly and settled it into her knitting bag on her arm and took up the supper tray. "I'll leave you now. Do go to bed early, Brook. Perhaps you *are* a little thinner than you should be."

JANE SUTHERLAND, in the following weeks, made a habit of working on the afghan up in Brook's room in the hour when the roast was browning or a casserole baking in the stove, and while Brook was doing the day's lesson assignments, and before Sam Falter came in on the 6:03.

Brook looked forward to that hour. It was comforting to know Aunt Jane would be there at the same time each day and Brook hoped something else would take the place of the afghan now that it was so nearly finished. The days were getting shorter and there was more and more work to crowd into these mid-term lesson hours with the Christmas holiday only two weeks away.

If her father phoned to say he was detained or if

Tommy and Brook would rather not drop what they were doing to come downstairs, Aunt Jane had her supper upstairs with one or the other.

This evening it had been Brook's turn. It was kind of her, Brook felt, to attempt to make it less noticeable that there were so few of them now, for without either one of them or without their father the table had a deserted, forlorn air.

Brook, having finished her history notes, was beginning to put away her books when Aunt Jane brought out of her knitting bag a small flat white box and a folded square of holly-sprigged pale blue paper. Aunt Jane opened the box. "It's been put away for a whole year. Fortunately, moths don't like sequins. At least I hope they don't." She lifted out a dainty gray scarf that had its flower design accented in sparkling gold.

"Why, it's lovely," Brook said.

"Well, it isn't anything I would choose for myself. It's just a well-meant gift I received last Christmas. I thought if you *were* going to your Aunt Marian's, it would be nice to bring her this. She always has an immense tree and this would be your small contribution. It would make me feel I'd put it to some use."

Brook stopped in the act of slipping her textbooks into her briefcase and sat back in her chair to look

at Aunt Jane. "I'd long ago decided I wasn't going."

Aunt Jane began to wrap the paper round the box and searched for and found a narrow red ribbon and tied the package with a dainty bow. Then she looked at Brook reflectively. "Many of the things your aunt said are quite true. Anyway, you may change your mind. And you might find her home very pleasant."

"But *this* is my home."

Aunt Jane looked troubled. "Tom's thinking of going on a cross-country trip," she said. "He's spoken of it twice this week. He *should* go, I think. A young boy as ambitious as Tom could learn a great deal, just as he says, by moving around. He needs the experience of being on his own for a little while. However, if he thought you were here alone, perhaps he wouldn't want to go."

While she talked, Brook followed a remembered line of thought: In that case Jane Sutherland would be here and Dad, too. Aunt Marian had said *She means to go on being in control. It'll be easy to talk herself into this marriage . . .*

"But Tommy will be back, even if he does go on a trip. And there's Dad." Brook hesitated, then said, "And—and you'll be here, won't you?"

"Of course I want to stay on, Brook. But I've a calendar full of appointments. I have turned some

down already but sooner or later I'll have to go elsewhere to take care of someone sick, perhaps critically sick. I thought I'd stay as long as I was really needed. Your father asked me to stay until the first of the new year. By then everything will be running smoothly, I know."

Brook took a deep breath and relaxed. Aunt Marian's suspicion was proved false. Sick people did need Aunt Jane far more than the Falter family. She might have known Jane Sutherland had no hidden motive, did not even want to stay beyond the time she was needed. Brook felt ridiculous to have accepted even for a moment the suspicious thought that began with Aunt Marian.

In the brief silence they heard Tom's door open and shut and heard him run quickly downstairs. Then the outside door closed behind him.

Aunt Jane prepared to clear away their supper things. When the plates were all on the tray, she said, "I'll be going now, Brook. I must leave a bit earlier tonight, but everything is in order. There are some exposed pipes I'd trouble with in my cellar last year. I asked the plumber to have a look at them this evening. Before the frost gets them. By the way, Sue came in for a moment early in the afternoon, while you were at the library, and borrowed the

French Dictionary. I don't think it's one of your books, Brook, but one she found downstairs. Probably Tom's. She said she'd be back with it later, so perhaps she'll soon be here with you for company."

Brook nodded. She wished suddenly that Aunt Jane was against her going to the Strattons', and against Tom's cross-country trip. But it seemed to her the thought came only as an echo to Aunt Marian's words, *The only person who made this a home is gone*. Not that she would ever go to live with Aunt Marian, no matter how much Jane Sutherland advised it. It was odd that Aunt Jane hadn't mentioned their father. How could they all desert him? Because if Jane Sutherland were leaving, and Tom going away, and if Aunt Jane was not against her going to the Strattons', why then it meant they would be leaving him alone. Alone—and perhaps in this way supplying a reason for his going the way of all the Falters, as Aunt Marian had said. But why didn't Jane Sutherland see this?

Brook heard the key in the downstairs door, after it had closed not five minutes ago. Then Aunt Jane was coming upstairs rather in a hurry, having forgotten something no doubt. From the head of the stairs outside Brook's door she said, "I forgot to tell you, Brook, Philip Cantrell telephoned. He said he'd

call you again at nine," she added, and came into Brook's room.

"Philip? But why did you bother to come back and all the way upstairs, Aunt Jane? He'd have phoned, as he said, and I'd have known then. Sure he didn't want Tom?"

"No, he asked for you."

"Well, thank you very much, Aunt Jane. Have you forgotten about the plumber?"

"No, I haven't," she said and went out, shutting the door of Brook's room gently. But Brook could not hear her going down the stairs. Instead she heard Brush bark, long and delightedly. Dad was coming home. No one else got quite the welcome Brush gave Dad.

And at once she knew.

She knew at once from the stumbling against the foyer settee, and again from the stumbling against the foot of the stairway and the curved step. Sickening dread in her heart and the sound of his slow stumbling ascent of the first set of stairs. Her eyes fell on the chintz-covered neatly made bed. From the bottom of her heart she longed to get under the covers and pull them over her ears, lock the door fast and get under the covers. Not see him. Not listen. *Couldn't one pretend to have what courage*

*it needed, at least, not to run away? Not do the expected thing? The expected Falter thing. Borrow courage somewhere. A little would do—a cupful.* Brook stood up and went to the door and opened it and stood beside Jane Sutherland at the head of the stairs, looking down. Now she reconstructed it. Jane Sutherland on her way to the station had looked back and had seen the taxi round the lower bend of Winterside Drive and returned to the house before he had made his way out of the cab. To wait and see if she were needed. All of this Brook knew as if she had seen it happen.

Standing there with her hand resting on the stair-rail, Aunt Jane said, "Do you want to go back to your room, Brook? I'll help him, if he needs help."

Perhaps Jane Sutherland knew her loathing, if anyone could know that particular loathing. Once Tom had said, one of the few times they had ever talked about it, "We've been through this so many times we ought to be used to it. Besides, it's almost an occupational disease. We oughtn't mind so much. I mean, you oughtn't mind so much." Did Tom mean he did not, but she knew he did. She could not help herself in any case. Could not help this flesh-crawling, could not help the skin of her body chilling, and the small fear beginning at her toes.

But she would not run away. Against her will she was reminded of Aunt Marian's warning. If he needs help, she thought, it's work for *me*. No one else. Not a stranger, surely.

"I'll go. I'll help him," she said. Her voice sounded sharp to herself. She walked down to the second floor while Jane Sutherland remained above.

He was resting his head on his arm and his arm was round the newel post. It was almost as if he were tired to exhaustion. All the lines of his body were downward. Hearing her steps, he lifted his head for an instant and she saw his flushed face and his fine dark eyes narrowed and reddened.

"Give me your arm, Dad. I'll help you." It seemed to her that, most of all, he needed comfort for his misery—whatever it was.

She could not believe it had happened. Her extended arm was rudely, hurtfully, flung away by him. "I certainly can manage a flight of steps," he said and lurched and caught himself and finally leaned upon her. "I can do this myself," he repeated, leaning heavily on her.

Once she thought they were both going downstairs in a heap, but they managed to stay upright, and at the top step he muttered irritably, "Don't you in-

terfere with me. I can manage a flight of steps anytime."

Aunt Jane had hastily turned the bed down.

His chest was heaving and he was saying thickly, "Thinking it over . . . not thinking it over but thinking it over all the same, I'd say—Go away, Brook. I don't feel well." He was no longer irritable. A long sob shook his body.

"It's all right, Dad," she whispered. But the cold loathing was all over her suddenly, all over her, and it was as always. He had changed for her, as he always changed at these times, into someone she did not know, someone unpredictable, who could fling her arm roughly away.

Aunt Jane was beside him, supporting him, easing him into a chair.

"Please go downstairs, Brook," she said. "Please turn up the furnace to 70, won't you? It's very chilly in here. And open the back door so Brush can get out. I think I hear him at the kitchen door. Please, Brook." And while she was talking she was attending to him, loosening his collar and quickly removing his coat and there were his bumbling, sobbing words while she was talking. But Brook was no longer looking at him.

She went to the door blindly, not trying to stop

her tears, and ran down the stairs, as a child might, to do Aunt Jane's bidding, to attend to the furnace first, then to the kitchen door for Brush. She went outside with Brush, breathing the sweet cold air, the untainted air—the clean, sweet, cold, frosty air.

The telephone had been ringing for a while, she supposed, before she could bring herself to go inside again. And her voice must have been strained and unlike her usual one because Philip said, "Is that you, Brook? You sound light-years away. I'd like to come over. I have pretty good news. I'd like to tell you right away."

It was all over her and around her and inside her, the blackness of despair, the hurting crushing despair, the futile struggle she had always avoided and pushed away. Nothing could ever hurt so much and it was as if all of it were tightly curled in her throat, preventing speech.

"Brook—are you still there?"

And it was again as it had been once before in the game room when she had listened to the clock, again she was running away from her thoughts to Philip and his good news.

"Tell me now," she said, making the enormous effort of speech.

"I can't on here. I want to show you a letter."

It receded a little, an ebb of crashing wave, receded to make room for thinking. "I must walk down to Sue's."

"I'll meet you halfway and walk you, if you don't mind. I'll come along Winterside. I'm leaving this minute."

"Wait—oh, all right."

It wouldn't do to have Sue return the dictionary, wouldn't do to have Philip coming by, not into a house where every corner was permeated with the poisoned air. Stillness and the heavy tainted air settling over the house, and not a sound from above.

She took her coat from the closet and looked into the mirror inside the door. It was not a bright light that hung above it and she leaned forward to study her face. No one could tell. No one could see although she had thought there would be the sign of it on her face. Only her eyes seemed grave and larger and not young.

There was no reason, she reflected at the door, for Aunt Jane to stay. He would sleep heavily, she knew. Aunt Jane would miss the plumber if she did not hurry home. She went to the foot of the stairs, hoping Aunt Jane would hear her and she would not have

to go upstairs. She waited a moment, then heard her firm step coming down toward her.

"Brook, did you want me?"

"You mustn't break up your own evening. You know he'll sleep now for a long time, until morning anyway. I've got to get that dictionary from Sue."

She nodded. "I'll go in a little while. I'll be gone, I think, when you return."

"Goodnight, Aunt Jane."

"Brook—there have been many weeks of strain. He feels it very deeply. Perhaps all at once it became unbearable."

But Aunt Jane had known it would happen. It had not surprised her.

"Yes, I know."

Jane Sutherland was downstairs now, standing beside her. "Brook, I think if you went to your Aunt Marian's—" But Brook refused to listen.

"Oh, no."

Philip was walking quickly toward her as she closed the front door.

"Hello—you took a long time. I came all the way here since I phoned."

"Hello—" Now she was out of the house she could breathe deeply again. "What's the news?"

Philip, walking beside her, reached into his inside

coat pocket. "Well, it's this. I think you'll appreciate reading the whole letter. Shall we go to Mentone's?" He was trying to suppress his excitement but it was useless and almost, almost she was concentrating on what he said.

"Mentone's is fine," Brook said.

There were only two others at the other end of the fountain at Mentone's Drug Store. He handed the letter to her and she took it and read it, then read it again. Now it began to make sense. The letterhead said *Yale Medical School*. "This is to advise you," it read, "that our Committee on Admissions, at its meeting held yesterday, voted to accept you for the class to matriculate in September of this year. You will have two weeks to reach a decision and we shall expect to hear from you prior to December 13." There was a businesslike request for a deposit of fifty dollars and the last line stated, "No acceptance is final until this fee has been paid."

Philip looked at her while she read as if she were, for the first time, making the acquaintance of deathless poetry, poetry that he in particular had been privileged to introduce to her. His eyes were shining.

"I wanted you to know before anyone else, Brook. I telephoned the minute this came. The family isn't home so you're the first to know. I *had* to tell you."

"What'll you have?" asked the boy behind the soda fountain for the third time and assumed, rightly, they wouldn't have anything but conversation.

"It's exciting news, Philip. I'm very happy for you," she said.

He nodded. "It seems a long time away but actually it isn't. I'm going up to New Haven for Christmas, as it happens, so the whole thing already seems to be beginning."

She was really happy for him. It was the best he had hoped for. Yale Medical. She wished she was able to sound more enthusiastic and sincere. But the news had a curious effect upon her. It was as if she could see herself shrink, become little and insignificant and keep shrinking still further. And with it the feeling of being an impostor.

All the rest, her own and Tom's friends, were on their way, planning the future. All of them were going to be valuable, already were, and their homes were as sound as they were themselves. Among them she was the impostor whom they really didn't know—who had come up from nowhere. They didn't know the Falters, nor the background of the Falters. They hadn't seen the sight that had met her eyes not an hour ago.

Their homes were free of it and their lives un-

complicated. There was nothing to hide. For an instant she could vividly remember what that close contact had meant, when he had leaned heavily against her and she had breathed the reeking air, the familiar reeking air.

And nothing could make up for it, not even the fact that he was "Sam Falter, brilliant journalist." She had seen it herself in a book called "The Top Ten of Newspaperdom." She knew about his quick perception of a situation and his ability to put it into unequivocal language, cutting through foggy wordiness to the bare truth. She knew it just as Tom knew it. And they knew it at the *Herald-Telegraph*, too. It was what made them keep him in spite of everything, take him back time after time.

But however brilliant he was and however much she loved him there was this flaw in him, the flaw that could wreck all their lives. And she knew that too. The particular flaw that could not be excused nor lightly passed over, as were Sue's numerous complaints about her family. Could not be talked about at all.

"I can't tell you how glad I am for you," she said, smiling at him.

"I thought of it this way before the letter came." Philip was suddenly embarrassed. "Just this way,

both of us talking and having this in my hand and letting you read it. Well, I'd better tell Tom. Is he home?"

A long time ago, it seemed to her, she had wished he would think of her as someone other than Tom's sister. Now he was asking her about Tom. But coming at this moment, it only increased the distance between Philip and herself. She studied Philip as if meeting him for the first time. Fine-marked eyebrows, and gray eyes lighting up in amusement or interest, dark hair and skin, clear and fair, that belonged with the eyes rather than the hair. Some of the childhood freckles still remained over the bridge of his nose. She glanced away.

It occurred to her that until this moment she had never been ashamed of their home. She was part of that home, closer to her father because her mother who had stood between them, shielding them from him at these times, was gone.

"Is Tom home?" Philip repeated, puzzled by her wandering interest.

She brought herself back. "No. I think he may be at the *Press*."

"I'll go down to pick him up and then we'll both come by for you if you'll wait at Sue's. I'll walk you there first."

She had almost forgotten she was going to head off Sue, to prevent her from bringing back the Dictionary. Not that the doorbell would be answered if Aunt Jane had gone, but Sue might be persistent. And on second thought, perhaps he would come downstairs. One could never be sure what he would do. Perhaps he would attempt to answer the doorbell. Oh, no. She stood up quickly.

"I must get over to Sue's right away. She has my Cassell."

They slipped off the counter stools and began walking out. The boy behind the counter remarked to no one in particular, "Well, we sure have nice comfortable seats, anyway."

IT WAS as though you had begun to dream or perhaps it was the other way round. Perhaps the other had been the dream and now Brook, awake, found herself in the very midst of a familiar household, busy and understandable, made up of equal and engaging parts of confusion and laughter and inconsequential chatter.

Sue and her two younger sisters and both her aunts were in the Sewing Room, an equivalent of the Game Room at the Falters'.

"Aunt Elly lowered her hem in a most peculiar way," Sue explained to Brook as she came into the buzzing room. "It looks scalloped but I'm straightening it all out. I did begin on the French, though, and I was going to walk down in a little while to return

your Cassell to you. Now, here's Mother," she said. "That solves everything."

Mrs. Willey, holding a book and apparently under a mistaken impression that she would be allowed to go on reading it in the surrounding commotion, greeted Brook affectionately and settled herself into a chair.

"Now, could I trust you to do this, Mother? As long as Brook is here, I'd like to finish my French. You must follow the old hem line. Here's the ruler. Two inches down, then pin."

Aunt Elly, standing on a chair and apparently oblivious to what was going on below her, continued to read a magazine, inquiring after a moment, "How close to done are you?"

"Keep reading, Aunt Elly, we're not nearly far enough along to interest you." Sue explained to Brook, "I hadn't quite finished with the dictionary. I'm glad you're on hand, though. What is *entendu*? It just stands alone without any words around to give you a clue."

"Understood, I think, but it can also mean O.K."

They went upstairs together and Sue went on with her interrupted translation. "You know there isn't a person in that downstairs room who understands a word of French. I envy you. Your father or Tommy

could help you out of this kind of snarl any day."

*Your father*, Sue said, as one would speak of any usual person one knew, accepting him unquestioningly. What would Sue think, Brook wondered, if she should say now, *This evening, Sue, I helped my father up the stairs because*—She shook her head in her accustomed small gesture of throwing off some troubling thing. "Cassell's the most dependable," Brook said.

"A girl's best friend is a French dictionary," Sue said, deliberately smug. "But imagine their ignorance." She pointed in the direction of downstairs. "Frankly I've no talent for French either."

"Well, better get busy, or your children will say the same harsh things you're saying about *them*."

They were both real, her own home and this, but this you could cling to, and love its shortcomings, and make fun of them. But the other—you shut the door of your memory on it, and left it to itself.

"I'll train them to remember where they put their dictionaries."

Shut your mind, if you can, to all that lay back home. Here it was easy and pleasant to forget. The noise that floated thinly up from below helped. The door swung open and the radio was at its maximum of noise production and Brook welcomed it. Sue's

youngest sister, Elly, shouted up the stairs begging for a record of Sue's. Sue found it and brought it down to her and let the door slam to, and Elly turned on her own radio and added a phonograph record to the din. It was bedlam and it was fine.

"I'm bringing up the last mile, Brook. Wait a second, may I have this good book again?" Sue turned open the dictionary. "Don't you wish we could type-write our homework?" She looked up. "Why not automatic translating typewriters that work without any effort on the operator's part? They've adding machines, you know."

"Has Philip been describing his Thought Camera to you?"

Sue laughed. "No, but Tom described it. Is there anything wrong with labor-saving devices?"

"Not a thing," Brook said. "For all I know they've already invented mechanical French translators."

"Something's keeping one out of my hands." She had to copy her translation again, Sue decided, and was doing so when the doorbell rang and from below Brook heard Tom's greetings.

"I hear Tom. Let's go down. Anyway, Mother's eyes aren't too good. I suppose the hem is getting wavy again."

"How much left to do?" Brook asked her.

"Are you going to make me finish this? Let's see now, one line." Sue was busily writing. "One-half line, five words. There!"

Brook, listening, heard Mr. Willey's voice, too, and Philip answering Mrs. Willey's question about the weather. They had walked home with Mr. Willey from the *Press*, she guessed.

"Dad's home. And I hear Philip Cantrell, too, you'll be pleased to know in case your own hearing is failing."

Brook glanced over Sue's shoulder and rapidly read through the translation. It was right, every word. The dictionary, she saw, was an old one of Tom's. "You might as well keep this battered one, Sue. We've another."

"Many thanks, especially for noticing my need is greater than thine."

Sue's room was the only one that wasn't brilliantly lighted at the Willeys'. The rest of the family liked plenty of light and they moved in rooms bright as daylight. The girls blinked as they came into the dining room where most of the family had gathered, the hem having been disposed of somehow. Sue went out to search in the refrigerator and came back with a tray of crackers, cheese, half of an apple pie, and two large ginger ales.

"Three people can have regular pieces of pie or six can have half-rations."

"I'll share mine with you, Mr. Willey."

"No, thanks, Brook. I'll have some crackers and sherry." He poured a glass of sherry for himself and said, "Is everyone aware that Philip is going to Yale?" And then carefully poured additional sherries for Philip and Tom.

There was always this moment, since Tom had grown up and been offered drinks, when a new kind of worry began in Brook's head. Tom held the glass and talked with Sue and the permeating odor of the house she had recently left now faintly reached her again. Tom set down his glass and ate the pie slowly and glanced at Brook and saw something there, while she was talking to little Elly, that disturbed him.

"You look tired out," he said, standing near her. "Want to go home?"

It was a recent and surprising thing, this solicitude of Tom's. She could not remember it while their mother was alive. It somehow refuted what Aunt Marian had said about boys living their own lives.

"Whenever *you're* ready."

Aunts and children went elsewhere and only Mr. Willey remained with them. Tom pretended Sue

was a prospective subscriber to the *Press* and Sue was being as sales-resistant as possible.

"It has to be twice as good to interest me," Sue said, returning to Tom a piece of his own mind, "I like to have more for my money."

"We'll have your picture on Page One if you subscribe," Tom said.

"Well, let me see—would you have fancy recipes daily?"

"Plain and fancy. I test them myself."

"Well, it happens we *have* a subscription," Sue said at last.

"Have another," Philip said.

They stood up to go, Tom and Brook and Philip, and Mr. Willey poured himself another sherry. "Neither of you has had the sherry."

They lifted their glasses and Philip said, "To the *Press*," and Tom added, "*And* its intelligent younger staff."

Mr. Willey said, "Well, I'm willing to drink to that." He was a good-humored small man who prided himself on being a good listener but had never been known to take advice on any subject. He sincerely believed the *Press* was a fine example of newspaper publishing and contained all the news that could possibly interest South Ebury and Maybury as well.

He was fond of both Tom and Philip and listened to Tom's plans for the paper as one listens to a precocious child, approving his lively imagination without taking any of his remarks seriously. "Impractical, Tom," was his most frequent comment.

Sitting there, Brook wondered whether Mr. Willey would still have offered the sherry to Tom if he knew the truth about their father. She watched Philip with his drink and compared him with Tom. But they were both taking an occasional sip, as if to oblige Mr. Willey rather than because they wanted it.

Yet this might be the beginning, the very beginning, if you were a Falter. Someone means well, and, in a little while, you aren't able to help yourself. All her tiredness turned to welling tears. It was an enormous effort to blink them back.

Brook half-listened to the boys, on the way home, talking about type sizes. Philip tried to include her in their conversation, asking her twice, "Don't you think so, Brook?" She nodded but this time she would not have minded in the least being left out of it.

"Goodnight, Tom. Tell me definitely about the holiday soon," Philip said, and, "Goodnight, Brook."

When Philip had left them at the corner of Winterside, she searched wearily for a way to let Tom know what to expect at home.

Tom meanwhile was saying, "Philip's going to visit at New Haven over Christmas. The people he's going to stay with asked him to bring a friend. But, of course, I wouldn't want to leave home this Christmas." He said it in a tentative way and it suddenly occurred to her he was asking her permission to go.

"You should go, Tom. I've been thinking about Christmas, too, and wondering what you'd do if I accepted Aunt Marian's invitation. She wants me to come to Sea Point."

It seemed on the moment a good solution. Their father, she was almost certain, now, would not be home over the holiday. It was so long familiar to her that she knew with heartsickening certainty how it would go. First the long absence, and a week later, perhaps two weeks later, he would be back, getting over it—slowly getting over it. The Club in New York was his address during these times. It almost arranged itself. There was nothing for her to do *but* go to Aunt Marian's.

"Do you want to go, Brook?"

"Oh, yes," she said, hoping she was convincing him. "I'd much rather, this time." Tommy understood, too, about this first Christmas.

"If you're sure. You know how much we used to dislike those Sea Point visits."

"They weren't so bad except that we were determined to dislike them in advance."

"It's hard for me to get along with the Strattons—either of them. But Aunt Marian long ago took a shine to you. I suppose," Tom added, "Dad will be at the Club."

She looked quickly at him.

"I was at home for a minute," he said. "Philip and I went in to look up something in my typeface book."

Philip knew then. "Did Dad come down?"

He shook his head. "No one could miss it," he said, "and Aunt Jane signaled to me besides. As if it weren't written all over the place."

At least Philip hadn't *seen*.

"Well—" she said, almost gratefully. There would be no need now to tell him herself.

"Well—" he repeated and added slowly, "there isn't anything we can do for him. There's a lot we don't know. It started way back. A person has to want to stop."

Perhaps Tom was right. Their father didn't want to stop, wanted only to forget. That was why he wasn't thinking of either of them or of his work, needing only to get away from himself. In that case there wasn't much use hoping, as she constantly did, that something would occur to her, something she

could say some day when he was himself and casually talking with her.

*There's a lot we don't know*, Tom said. Suppose you read everything about it, suppose there was a book that could tell you everything about it—or a great deal about it, anyway. It would help you to help him. Tomorrow, she promised herself, she would go to the library. At least find out. At least learn what others had found out. That was the first step. Not run away from it. Find out. Face it.

"We'll all be back New Year's Day," Brook said, not to dwell on it longer, and feeling lighter of heart. "And Aunt Jane will be glad of the vacation."

"Except Sam Falter—don't count on him."

She nodded.

She would have to write to Aunt Marian in the morning. She planned to be up very early. Perhaps her father would not leave this time. If only she could talk to him about it. In spite of what Tom thought she felt she could talk about it now, after this last time. They had always been close friends.

*If memory serves*, Uncle Henry had long ago said. But memory serves each differently, particularly herself and Uncle Henry.

Just before bedtime she had been at the round window on Ninth Street, or perhaps it was Eleventh

Street. She and Tommy both called it that. Actually it was not one window but six narrow ones built in a bay. Underneath the window was a semicircle of upholstered seat.

"Not too close, Brook. The window's cold," her mother said. "Don't lean too close. You've just had your bath."

But it was no use telling her not to lean too close. Her nose would, involuntarily, approach the pane and press against it as she waited and watched for him. She could not remember Tommy waiting with her at the round window. Only she was there waiting, alone, for him.

Even if the light was already fading, she could recognize him. He was so tall and walked so quickly. When he saw her he made a large arc with his arm, beginning over his head.

She ran to the door as he came in and he stood tall and straight and waited for her to take a running leap. Then he lifted her and kissed her.

"Right pocket or left pocket?" he asked her. Sometimes the air about him was cold. And sometimes a little of the wetness was still on his shoulders and she felt its wetness as he lifted her high to kiss her.

"Right pocket or left pocket?" he would repeat.

It didn't make a bit of difference, for of course she

would get whatever it was, whatever she said, but it was a thrilling game to attempt to guess.

"Right pocket," she said.

He looked downcast. "Only one more chance."

She waited a long time, her brows drawn down in imitation of his to signify the enormous effort of thinking.

"Left pocket," she said at last, not able to wait an instant longer.

He looked as if he could scarcely believe she had been so clever.

"Left pocket it is," and guided her hand because it was still difficult to know which was one's left hand, and pockets were even more difficult.

It was a toy to wind up or a small jar of sour balls or a flashlight or a package of chocolate-covered peppermints. Whatever it was it was always and miraculously the very thing she wanted most of all in the world at that moment. They had always been close friends.

In the morning, when she awoke, long before Tommy, she walked into the hall and saw that her father's door was open. He had already left.

SOUTH EBURY shop windows reflected the season overnight with looped tinsel and drifts of imitation snow sifted over underwear and tennis rackets and tools. At school there was already a restless holiday spirit in the air and the Choral Club was meeting daily to rehearse carols. Only the weather remained gray-wet and penetrating and stubbornly Novemberish.

At the Falters there had not been big family gatherings for a number of years, not since the disastrous Christmas dinner when the whole family had assembled—with the exception of the host, Sam Falter.

Sue had put herself to work early in October, as a result of the postoffice campaign to send greeting cards and gifts early, so that first to arrive at the

Falters' was a watercolor portrait of Brush bearing greetings from Sue. There was another card with a live holly twig attached to it by a thin silver thread. It bore greetings from Aunt Marian and Uncle Henry and when, later, Brook thought to look inside, she discovered a closely written note for herself.

"Please come for the holiday," Aunt Marian wrote. "Let's say Monday of next week. As Thursday is Christmas we will have a few preparatory days. We do want to make this a happy holiday for you. Unless we hear from you to the contrary we'll expect you on the eight o'clock. I'll be waiting for you at the Sea Point Station."

Brook had delayed writing Aunt Marian and now not having to write first made it far easier. It remained only to talk with Aunt Jane about her own plans. In the late afternoon, as she opened the door, Brook overheard Aunt Jane saying over the telephone, "I think for this holiday at any rate I'd better stand by. I did promise to stay until the first of the year. I would love to, Emma, and thank you for asking me."

"Aunt Marian insists on my coming out for Christmas," she later told Aunt Jane who looked searchingly at Brook.

"Do you *want* to go, Brook? You know we could

have a lovely Christmas here. Even Tom's plans needn't interfere."

"I *would* like a change from South Ebury," she said, "and Tommy's going up to New Haven for the holiday."

"Definitely going?"

"Oh, yes. With Philip."

Then they both fell silent, both thinking of the other member of the family.

Aunt Jane broke the silence. "Do you want to do a bit of shopping? The shops look so attractive. I'll write Sam Falter my address and send it to the Club, in case he wants one of us for some reason or another. And I'll add yours and Tom's addresses, too. He'll write or telephone one of us in that case."

It was an uncertain solution but, Brook reflected, it was an uncertain circumstance and far better than for all of them to be restlessly waiting here. If the past was any guide, he'd be at the Club, or at any rate not at home, through Christmas and afterward.

"I'll take Brush and Bella with me," Aunt Jane added, "and Bodoni is wanted next door."

Brook prepared to go out but it wasn't to go shopping or even to walk toward Frog Pond. She wanted to make a telephone call first and then hurry to the library before closing time.

She was slipping into her mother's place, she felt, when she telephoned the *Herald-Telegraph* and asked for Sam Falter.

"Is this his daughter?"

"Yes, this is Brook Falter."

"Just a moment."

As she waited for his reply she heard the same rhythmic thumpings so familiar at the *Press*, or perhaps it only seemed so. And perhaps it would be his voice answering now, telling her he'd be home as usual on the 6:03. Then as if a door had been shut the noise was closed off and a young man's voice was saying, "This is Bill Cullen. Sam Falter's not been in this week." He hesitated a moment then added, "Miss Falter, I wouldn't worry. Someone's just told me he's at the Club."

"Well," she said, and paused and the pause grew too long. "Well, thank you. And would you please have him telephone me at Sea Point 74 if he *should* come in?"

"Certainly. Sea Point 74. Sorry I can't be more helpful." Bill Cullen sounded as if he meant it.

She put up the receiver carefully and walked out and along the windy street in the direction of the library. No matter how much arranging she could do for herself, she thought with a heavy heart, or for

Tom or even for Aunt Jane, she could do nothing for her father, and this feeling of helplessness toward him overwhelmed and discouraged her.

Inside the library she looked, passing by, into the Clay Club case. The little leopard was gone. She stood perplexed missing him as much as if someone she was attached to had disappeared leaving no address.

Disappointedly she walked to the card files and searched under the A's. There were four titles on the subject but when she looked on the shelves not one of the books was there. She wrote their titles on a slip of paper and began to go to the desk to reserve them.

Miss Easton was writing at the desk and would have to receive the reserve cards. Miss Easton would wonder, perhaps guess, why she was interested in books on alcohol and its effects. Instead of making the reservations she folded the slip with the titles written on it and put it into her pocket. Perhaps, she thought, at the Sea Point Library they would have these same titles. Aunt Marian had already described the Sea Point Library as being twice as large as the South Ebury branch. Of course, that was the place to find the books she wanted.

In itself the Library was a good reason for visiting

Aunt Marian. Besides, the visit was for so short a time. They would all be back New Year's Day, she told herself. And in the meantime Dad would telephone her if he should come in. He always came to the paper first, then home.

In the quietness of the library she remembered how eagerly they had begged to be awakened, Tommy and she, at the stroke of midnight each New Year's Eve.

She had been three and her mother had said softly, "Brook, dearest, a Happy New Year."

"Is it next year now?"

"Yes, darling."

Much better to be apart this year. Much better than everyone's having the lost look of remembering.

Their father, too, had not wanted to remember at this season. She wondered if it had been this persistent thought that caused this last escape.

Brook turned to walk out of the library and passed the reference shelves and caught sight of Philip Cantrell in the reading room. He looked up and saw her, too, and waved but made no move to get up. No doubt he was busy but perhaps this would be the last chance she would have to wish him a happy holiday. She went into the reading room and slipped into the chair beside him.

"I wanted to tell you to take good care of Tom," she whispered. "I'm going to visit my Aunt Marian."

"Tom said you might. I'm glad I've induced him to come with me."

She nodded and glanced, in the casually curious way one looks at books being read by others, at the ones open before him. But he was gathering them up and stood up with Brook, and then carried them so their titles were not visible.

"Research?" she said.

"In a way."

She was puzzled briefly, as she stood waiting for his books to be stamped. He was always eager to talk about his work whenever problems arose at the paper or at school.

At the door he turned right and said, "We'll have to go back to Mentone's when we come back. I remembered later we never got to the sodas."

She thought about it for a moment, and then began to laugh, "Didn't we?"

He shook his head, and said abruptly, "Well, until soon—a Merry Christmas," and hurried away.

It was a small thing, this matter of Philip's hurrying off. Unimportant, she knew, but loneliness swept over Brook. Philip hadn't wanted to walk her home and there was the whole Christmas holiday stretch-

ing bleakly ahead with their family separated and the dreadful hurting thought of her father away from them, choosing his particular way of forgetting they even existed. A door opened along Chestnut Street and the carol came to her full-throated and strong from a turned-up radio

*Deck the halls with wreaths of holly*

*'Tis the season to be jolly . . .*

And as if all of this weren't enough—her mouth became a straight pressed-down line—the little leopard is gone.

*Dear Aunt Marian, she wrote, I want very much to come.*

“WE’RE home, wake up, Brook,” Aunt Marian said, but Brook had not been asleep. She had shut her eyes for a moment to visualize Maudie again and Aunt Marian’s house, out of her memory of both. Particularly Maudie.

Aunt Marian’s house had large, bright rooms looking a little like the museum rooms one always saw carefully roped off, ready at all times for inspection. Maudie who kept Aunt Marian’s house looking this way was small and spry and ageless and scurried out of the way whenever she thought she was observed.

Once, on a visit to Aunt Marian, when Brook was very young, Maudie had found her crying by herself—lonely, and quietly crying. She had brought

from heaven knew where a small toy bear for Brook and Brook had loved that bear and still remembered its fuzzy comfort. She had named the bear Maudie and somewhere it still remained among her treasures. She could never bring herself to part with the bear, Maudie.

Maudie, when Brook tried to talk to her, answered as if she did not want anyone to hear her, least of all Brook, but on another occasion—it had been in the long period when the cold whiteness of milk, both sight and taste of it reduced Brook's stomach to panic—Maudie somehow had ferreted out the trouble.

"Shut your eyes, Brook, and taste it," she had whispered unobserved and at the dinner table with Uncle Henry's eyes upon her she had done just that. But it wasn't milk at all. It was something else that looked like milk, sweet and vanilla-flavored. And from then on there was no longer the need for bracing oneself against the hours of eating.

Aunt Marian turned up the curved drive and stopped, "And you remember Maudie. Here she is."

Brook smiled and looked into Maudie's eyes, remembering the endless kindnesses of Maudie but Maudie only stared at Brook.

"What's the matter, Maudie? Come along, get Brook's things. She's tired."

"Imagine," Maudie said. And again, "Imagine." Then added, "You're a lady, Brook."

"I'm not sure," Brook said, still smiling at Maudie. She must be looking very different to have so transfixed Maudie, but whether the change was for better or worse, Maudie's startled look gave no hint.

It was a lovely room, not a bedroom at all but a small sitting room and the couch covered in bright flowery chintz became a bed by removing the three pillows with the cherry-red ruffles. There was a closet, dark green inside with the same cherry-red ruffles along its shelves and a half-closet for shoes. She hung away her few clothes and opened another door that led to a small perfect bathroom of seagreen that gave back silver flashes of light as the wintry sunlight came in through the casement and fell upon the heavy chrome fittings.

"You do like it, don't you?" Brook turned quickly round. Aunt Marian had followed her over the broadloomed floor.

"It's a dear room. I don't remember its being this way at all."

"It's newly redone. You remember I said I wasn't quite ready for you when I saw you that afternoon at home. Well, now, it's finished and it's yours."

Aunt Marian stood tall and straight and there was the sort of finality about what she said that somehow did not allow of discussion. Still, it wasn't hers, at all.

"Brook, dear, come sit by me." Her aunt sat on the couch with its gay pillows. She looked young today, and slender, and Brook wondered how it would feel to be Aunt Marian and live long cheerful days, carefree and pleasant days, in this neat handsome house. Now she, Brook, was here too and all of it was offered to her to be her own. How pleasant it would be, she went on thinking, if by some magic of turned-back time Aunt Marian would suddenly change into her own mother and then if one could take some of Uncle Henry's qualities, the durable, homespun ones, the rigid, unyielding ones, and graft them on to Dad, not changing Dad at all in the process, and then have Tom, but no changes in Tom. Certainly not. But then one might as well not change houses at all. Their own house in South Ebury would do as well. Better, as Philip knew his way there. What nonsense she was thinking. Perhaps she *was* tired as Aunt Marian said. She began to listen to Aunt Marian who had begun talking a minute or so ago.

". . . a new environment means a great deal. How

much, Brook, you can hardly tell yet. This place, even this room, suits you perfectly. You know we are recognized here as a *good* family," adding, "let me help you hang away your things." Aunt Marian stood up.

"I really haven't much along with me. I hung everything up when I came."

Aunt Marian went to the cherry-ruffled closet and opened the door and stood there looking over Brook's clothing. "Very plain-Jane," she commented, and then smiled at Brook. "I've a good idea. We'll go down to Haverhill Wednesday and select some really nice things for you. Now let's see about a dress to wear at your first dinner with us tonight. What's this?"

It was a plain black frock, shortsleeved and conspicuously shiny of fabric, with a bit of ruffled white organdie at the neck. Aunt Jane had obviously included it only for Aunt Marian's sake and in the interests of variety as the rest of Brook's wardrobe consisted of sweaters and skirts.

"I hardly ever wear it."

"Well, it's nice. With a rosebud or two at the shoulder, it'll do very well. As it happens some flowers are being sent up in the afternoon. But it does need a bit of lengthening, perhaps."

"I can do that easily. Do you think two inches will be enough?"

She held it up beside Brook. "Two inches will be fine. I'd help you with it but I've a lunch appointment. Maudie will bring you your lunch and I'll tell her to iron down your hem. I'll be back long before dinner."

Maudie, on this visit of Brook's, resolutely refused to be drawn into conversation. After she had placed Brook's lunch on the long dining room table and Brook had asked if she could iron down the new hem herself, Maudie frowned and shook her head and bore away the dress without another word. It was clear to Brook that she must make a good impression on Maudie before Maudie would begin to trust her. Brook had moved into another classification, obviously, in Maudie's opinion. She had become a "lady," and no longer a child requiring her care. Maudie had determinedly forgotten the past.

The lonely lunch was left almost untouched by Brook, especially as there were celery sticks that made a thundering noise in the silence when she took a bite of one, and discouraged her from going on. Afterward she tried to bring her wandering attention to a book of Mexican travel, abandoning it to look at the fashion magazines. She could only make them

tolerable by thinking up possible comments Tom and Philip would make over ladies poised on cliffs, for instance, in wholly inadequate clothing.

Maudie continued invisible, working busily in the laundry, Brook thought, from the kind of noises she heard every now and then. The house was still and the rooms seemed uncomfortably chilly this overcast day of December. After she tried once more and unsuccessfully to read, Brook went back to her room upstairs and began a letter to Sue, a letter that would never be mailed, she knew.

Dear Sue,

This is a lovely house. There are fourteen rooms and three bathrooms. Maid service is furnished. This house is well kept and in fine running order. It needs very little besides you and Tom and maybe Philip to drop books in every room and to leave half-finished clay models and chess games out with the men scattered and jackets over chairs and an occasional stray necktie . . .

She must have dozed off because when she looked up there was Maudie straightening up about her.

"What time is it, Maudie?"

"Almost five," she said. "I came up to make a noise. So you won't be late for dinner. Getting dressed and everything. Mrs. Stratton doesn't like lateness."

"I know," Brook said. She felt Maudie and she were in the same category, outsiders, here on sufferance and having to behave according to house rules. "Of course it doesn't take me long to get dressed."

Maudie continued to stand nearby though poised to fly. "And another thing—"

"What is it, Maudie?" Brook began to be alarmed over Maudie's serious air.

"When you run the shower don't run it too long. Mrs. Stratton doesn't like wasting water. You must be quick under the shower, she says."

Brook nodded, somewhat relieved. "Well, I won't be here long enough to waste too much water, Maudie."

Maudie looked at her in surprise. "You won't? Mrs. Stratton said you'd come to live."

"She did? Why, of course not. I've—"

There was the sudden sound of the downstairs door opening and shutting and Maudie had barely time to get out of Brook's room before Aunt Marian was upstairs.

"Heavens, I'm late. Why, Brook, not dressed yet?

What are you doing upstairs, Maudie, at this hour? I can't see how you find time to chatter all day long," she was addressing Maudie's swiftly retreating back.

It was a reproach addressed to Maudie but it clearly included Brook. Brook turned away from her aunt saying, "I'm sure I don't know where the afternoon went, Aunt Marian. I must have gone to sleep. Maudie's just been straightening up."

"Really?" she said, her voice sufficiently raised so it must have reached Maudie. "Our schedule calls for your room in the morning." She spoke with some asperity, then dropped that tone suddenly. "Brook, do you like what they did to my hair?"

It was drawn tightly back from her forehead and gave to Aunt Marian's handsome features clear-cut sharpness, even gauntness. Brook thought of the word "relentless," and could not help wondering what Aunt Marian would say if she were now to say, "Well, Aunt Marian, you do look a bit relentless."

Instead she nodded. "It's a favorite hair-do in the magazines I've just been looking at, downstairs."

"Well, there it is," Aunt Marian said and glanced into the mirror. "Please hurry, Brook, you aren't dressed. Didn't Maudie say I don't like to be kept waiting?"

It might have been a trap to catch Maudie com-

plaining. You couldn't say no and you couldn't say yes, like Tom's favorite question that went, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" And thinking of Tom she was reminded of one of Tom's frequent bits of advice. "Just accept things, Brook, and people too." She threw off the ungenerous thought about Aunt Marian.

"I know you don't," she said. "Hardly anyone does." She hurried along her dressing. Soon Uncle Henry would be here, not that she was over-fond of Uncle Henry but it did mean there'd be a little wider talk.

She studied herself in the mirror as she brushed her hair. Suddenly and overwhelmingly she longed to be back home with Tommy, downstairs in the warm friendliness of the game room with Philip there, too. But imagine being homesick, she thought at once, trying to forget her thoughts of home, imagine being homesick when she had all but begged to come.

There was no help for it now, in any case, and she was here for a ten-day visit. She went downstairs determined to be cheerful and conversational with Uncle Henry.

Aunt Marian pinned six tiny pale-cream rosebuds at Brook's shoulder and when Brook glanced into the

hall mirror she was surprised to find that the simple black dress was changed into something almost beautiful.

Brook awoke the next morning, eager to go on with her plans. There was, first of all, the trip she had to make to the library and, besides, she was restless and wanted more than any other thing to get away from Aunt Marian's house for a swift walk—anywhere.

She dressed quickly and before her aunt was up told Maudie she would be back at noon. She hurried to the library, remembering it was on Main Street and discovered, as she ran up the library steps, the placard that said it was closed Tuesdays and Thursdays. It was a disappointment, especially as Aunt Marian was going to take her shopping tomorrow, and tomorrow was Wednesday.

She explored the neighborhood instead and walked down side roads until she reached the shore and looked at the wintry bleakness of the ocean with a feeling of relief. It was open and limitless, and sea and sky merged in gray mist. But coming back to Aunt Marian's orderly house, the restlessness came back to her doubly. All her thoughts of her father were painful and inconclusive and she could only

think—Surely there is a way to do something. There must be a way.

She wondered what Tom and Philip were doing in New Haven this morning. Perhaps they would write her. Perhaps Tom would telephone. How could she possibly get through the week ahead?

It wasn't too difficult, after all. Once she had gone over the hump of that first afternoon and next morning, the hours went more quickly.

Aunt Marian had not changed very much, she saw, since the days she had observed Brook as a child, observed her coolly and misread completely the state of her heart.

Wednesday was a day of deep blue skies, clear and coldly sunny, and one could smell the salt in the air when the wind blew from the sea. Aunt Marian was ready and waiting for her at breakfast.

"With Christmas a day away we'll just have to get there early." Brook ate hastily and briefly, under Aunt Marian's observation, and they drove to Haverhill at an even fifty.

In addition to things for Brook, something for Maudie would have to be bought this morning. At the last minute Aunt Marian had decided against a gift of money which had been her custom up to now.

"Something in a big box," Aunt Marian said. "You know they love to open big boxes." *They*, Brook gathered, meant the whole class to which Maudie belonged, alien, different, not having ordinary human traits. "Let me see, what about a hat?"

"But can you buy a hat without the person along?" Brook asked.

"Oh, don't worry, my dear. I know what Maudie can and cannot wear." They went to the millinery department when they had arrived at the store and Aunt Marian discovered a hat. "How's this?" She held it up for Brook to see.

It was a large hat of gray felt with pink carnations weighing down the brim and the thought of it on Maudie astounded Brook.

"She'll love it," Aunt Marian said and bought it after consulting the price tag. *Reduced*, it read, *from \$17.50 to \$5*. "And what would you like, Brook, for a surprise?" Aunt Marian asked.

It was odd how often Aunt Marian could make her feel suddenly embarrassed and ill-at-ease. Wondering about it she now saw it was because she put hard-to-answer questions to her, point-blank, shot-out questions.

Brook looked dubious and said truthfully, "I can't think of a thing."

"Well, then, let it be something of *my* choice. What about a stunning winter outfit?" She was so genuinely eager that Brook found herself sharing her excitement over the winter outfit.

"Won't it be—very expensive?" she tried to keep herself from being entirely carried away.

But Aunt Marian shook her head impatiently. "We'll see."

In the girls' clothes department, Brook lingered over a gray corduroy suit but Aunt Marian objected. "It's rather junior, Brook, for you. Let's see more formal things."

Afterward, checking off the purchases in her mind, Brook saw that all were of Aunt Marian's choosing. They were far more than Brook had ever dreamed of possessing: a short, fitted jacket of stiff deep-green taffeta, a wide, long, matching skirt, a blouse of fine white batiste with dainty ruffles at the high neck, dark green suede shoes and misty nylon stockings—four pairs of these—and a dark green suede handbag, folded like a wide envelope with a large gold ring to close it.

Among the hats, once more, Aunt Marian let Brook, unlike Maudie, select her own. "Only it must be matching green to go with the rest of the things. You know, in the spring, you'll be wearing all of this together. Now try this." It was a dear small thing,

very simple and very expensive and for trimming had three small formal bows of matching green ribbon.

"Perfect," Aunt Marian said, "and looks lovely in back." She handed Brook a hand mirror and the girl who was showing them the hats said, "Hold it this way and you'll see better and Mother can see the profile."

Aunt Marian was pleased. "We'll take it," she said, offering no correction. *Now pretend you're my little girl and hold my hand, Brook*, Aunt Marian had often said on the long-ago visits to her. It seemed to Brook she was still playing that game, pretending to herself. Perhaps that was all it was—Aunt Marian wanting badly to have a daughter and not having one of her own and borrowing Brook for the look of the thing. It cast a softer light on Aunt Marian.

"I've a short gray Persian coat for you to wear with all of this. I think it would be just right for you."

*Just right for you.* As if someone had said to Brook: Choose the most beautiful of all possible clothing—and the most expensive. Now, if you're sure you've everything, everything you've ever fondly dreamed of, why then we'll consider it *just right for you*.

She could hardly believe the things were hers.

And when everything had been bought, had she heard her aunt say, "I've a short gray Persian coat." "*Persian?*" She caught her breath. In her mind she was dressed in all these things and she was sitting at the side of Frog Pond—or perhaps leaning against a cliff, as in the fashion magazines—and beside her, beside her was Philip who was saying, "Why Brook, I never knew you could be so beautiful."

The organ, placed in the balcony, was pumping out with vigor, *Adeste Fidelis*. The air was filled with the noble music and she walked in splendor through the store. Perhaps the music was a bit too much and perhaps she would rather have only Philip's imagined words in her ears, *I never knew you could be so beautiful*.

Brook carried as many of the packages as she could but Aunt Marian had the rest. They walked to the car and were seated in the car and the packages were neatly piled in the back, but Brook still saw herself walking in beauty. The austere, beautiful words came suddenly to her, ". . . like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies." She watched the early sunset colors fading in the western sky as they drove homeward. Aunt Marian had been talking for quite a while. She told Brook something about Maudie that was proving without question Maudie's deep

devotion, and Brook made the enormous effort of listening.

But she could not help thinking of Aunt Marian differently than before. Aunt Marian had been as generous as it was possible for any human being to be, and up to this moment, she, Brook, had accepted all of it as if it were her due. Had, in fact, been grudging about it. Her room at Aunt Marian's, for instance. It had been especially redone for her, Brook. She had not even thought to thank Aunt Marian for it. And she had offered her home to her as a daughter, a relationship that could not be closer. Had offered it, in spite of her negative and rude attitude. Embarrassment swept over Brook. She could at the very least have been gracious about all of it.

Even Jane Sutherland had said Aunt Marian had told the truth. Suppose—only suppose—that she did decide to live with Aunt Marian. She peopled Aunt Marian's long living room with Tom and Philip and Sue. There was music and they were dancing and in the other room, the sitting room off the living room, Aunt Marian in her long, beautiful shining dark satin dress was daintily putting the final touches to the elaborate party spread. Uncle Henry, dependable and on time, was coming in at that moment and greeting them briskly but nevertheless warmly and

enthusiastically. Well, perhaps not enthusiastically, but he would be pleasant and hearty.

Another thought suddenly cut across the colorful imaginings of Brook. It made her say—interrupting Aunt Marian to do so—“Aunt Marian, I feel I ought at least to pay for these beautiful things myself. After all, it is very kind of you to select everything but, at least, let it be a loan to me. Would you let me do that, Aunt Marian?”

“Do you really mean that, Brook? It’s a very nice thought.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, perhaps we can work something out,” Aunt Marian said, with an air of detachment. “Would it make you feel better about it if I said you could earn them?”

It was as though she were saying something with a catch in it, seeming to be wary with Brook. There was no use pretending there wasn’t this secrecy about Aunt Marian, as if the things she did had some other, hidden, purpose. And now she knew why it was she had been resentful of the music of *Adeste Fidelis*, fervently played by the organ in the store. The noble music had so obviously been put to a false use, just as she felt, suddenly, that Aunt Marian was being kind in the same way. Kind for a purpose just as the

noble music was played for a purpose, inspiring the crowds to indulge their noble feelings, translating them into purchases.

"I would like to earn them, Aunt Marian," she said quietly.

The town was left behind and Aunt Marian was stepping up her car to fifty once more.

"By the way, my dear, are you sure you want to go on with school at all this year? You don't have to, of course."

"You mean college in the Fall?"

"No. Finish up at high school, I mean. You may feel there is too much of an adjustment to make this way, transferring to Sea Point and beginning all over again in a way. Naturally it would be easy enough to find out about the Sea Point High School and to inquire if there's room. Schools are so crowded, I hear."

"But why, if—"

"Well, if you are going to stay with us." She glanced quickly down at the few packages that lay between them. They held some of the smaller things she had bought for Brook, and Brook understood at once what that glance meant. But Aunt Marian did not let it go at that. She explained it as well. "I do want you to stay with us. When you said you would

like to pay for these things I thought it could be arranged as an exchange. Companionship, Brook, since you won't accept these as gifts, in return for living with us. If you prefer, let's call it being my secretary. I've many social engagements. Maudie cannot learn to speak properly to people over the telephone, much less take care of social correspondence. I thought you might like to do these things."

It hadn't been a holiday invitation that Aunt Marian had in mind. Sitting beside her now and being driven along wintry roads she saw how firm Aunt Marian could be once she had made up her mind.

She had accepted the clothes and could only too well imagine how Aunt Marian would deal with her if she took a notion to stay only so long as it suited her, Brook. Well, no matter what, school would have to go on. At home nothing was more important than school. It came first, before everything else, before eating and sleeping. Unless you were sick and couldn't help yourself, you were expected to attend school.

"I'd like to help you, of course, Aunt Marian," she said at last, "but I had better get through school as I'm this close to finishing. I've just this term and the spring term before graduation."

"If you prefer," Aunt Marian said, obviously not preferring it herself. "I keep thinking of your mother's wasted effort. She went to college, began to teach, was attracted to someone not good enough for her and married him. The inevitable result, no one knows better than you, Brook. Her life was *wrecked*."

Brook did not think her mother would have agreed, in spite of the disappointment. It was something very different that had gone wrong, something she could not understand but then neither could Aunt Marian, and education was certainly not the cause of it. And, in this sweeping appraisal of Aunt Marian's, where did she and Tom fit? She felt they were worth considering, at least.

She could never hope to explain this to her aunt. She sat listening to Aunt Marian who was continuing. "It may sound decidedly old-fashioned to you, Brook, but I still think too much education is a foolish thing, particularly for a woman. A busy woman intent on all sorts of studies can't do much with herself. You know all that takes time. Why, it takes time to do one's nails properly."

Brook looked down at her own only passable fingernails.

"And to do one's hair so it shines," Aunt Marian went on, "—and one's skin needs constant care.

Everyone needs plenty of rest and exercise, besides. You cannot get these pursuing a career."

She would have to tell her, Brook decided, and it wasn't going to be easy. But, to hearten herself she began to think of Philip's eager voice over the telephone and the look of Philip's face as he watched her read the letter from Yale Medical as if it were pure poetry.

Nor could she hope to explain to Aunt Marian how she felt about the threshold to which Dr. Davitt had brought them, or the feeling that Dr. Davitt had communicated to them about the words, Research and Discovery. She did not even attempt to explain. She simply said, "I'd have to go on. I couldn't stop now. And I don't think," she added recklessly, "marriage ought to depend on little things like—well, nail polish."

There was a long silence. And Aunt Marian seemed to have added at least ten miles per hour to her speed. Perhaps Aunt Marian was angry with her, especially being given that last gratuitous insult. Brook was very sorry she had said it. When at last Aunt Marian spoke they were near home. She said coldly, "Very well. We'll see about the Sea Point School."

She was assuming, it came to Brook with some-

thing of a shock, that she had already made the decision of living with them. It was only the matter of going or not going to school, they were discussing.

"I feel it's all ridiculous," Aunt Marian summed up as they began to go up the driveway, "really ridiculous. You were talking the same nonsense to Uncle Henry, you know, the first night you came, telling him the vague school ambitions you have. It reminds me of a little boy saying he wants to be a fireman. I'd say think ahead, Brook. You've got to make a good impression. Learn good manners. Later on, you would naturally think of marriage as a career. It *is* a career, though your career-lady never seems to find it out until her own marriage is teetering, if not positively shattered."

As she stepped from her car, Aunt Marian's hair was undisturbed, exactly as it had been the moment she had stepped from the doorway this morning. Her suit was well pressed and all the things she said about good appearance were true of her: her nails were faultless and her figure excellent. Why wasn't she beautiful, then, Brook wondered, or happy?

VERY early Christmas morning Brook came softly downstairs with her three modest packages of which the most magnificent was the scarf Aunt Jane had given her to give to Aunt Marian. The other two, chosen with some misgivings for Uncle Henry and Maudie, were, to say the least, conservative. There was a white wool muffler for Uncle Henry and a comb and brush set for Maudie.

She put these under the immense tree that Uncle Henry and Maudie had decorated while Aunt Marian had been shopping with her. Now, looking at the heaped packages, large and small, Brook saw that with the exception of Aunt Marian's gift for Maudie and an exchange between Uncle Henry and Aunt Marian all the rest were for herself. She recog-

nized the large boxes of yesterday's shopping but there were also small, more mysterious ones, and all marked "For Brook."

She went back to bed, and the excitement she had felt for a little while, after her clothes had been bought yesterday, came back to her. They were so unbelievably beautiful. In her mind she saw again each lovely thing. Then reluctantly let the thought of the new things fade from her mind as she began to think once more of the exchange she had seemed to make with Aunt Marian—clothes for companionship. After a moment even this slipped from her mind as she thought anxiously of her father.

It seemed a long time before she heard the Strattons go downstairs. Then she waited a little while longer and came down to join them.

Even Uncle Henry was friendly and broadly smiling this morning. Both Aunt Marian and Uncle Henry were greatly pleased with Brook's gifts. Maudie, obviously joyous today, carried off her presents including Brook's gift to her, with unqualified excitement. Brook had almost overlooked it, when Uncle Henry stooped and took up a little box that he handed to her.

"This little trinket belonged to my mother, your Grandmother Stratton. I'd like to see you wear it

often." Uncle Henry unbent still further. "It ought to be very nice for you."

She opened the little box then and there. Uncle Henry seemed to be waiting for her to look at it. It was a four-leafed clover with its leaves made of seed pearls and in the center of the four leaves there was a diamond, a brightly glistening, true, small diamond.

"For me?"

"Now get dressed, Brook," Aunt Marian said. "I can't wait to see it all together, diamonds and all. Dinner's at three, and the Cottens are coming. They're always prompt."

Laden with her gifts, she hurried upstairs. Her fingers flew to undo the packages, to shake out the clothes, to look again at each darling thing and, at last, to put them on. She was conscious that she was changing herself into Aunt Marian's design for a young girl aged seventeen named Brook Falter, but no fairy godmother could have transformed her more completely and enchantingly.

She stood before the long mirror studying herself and doubting her eyes. It seemed to her that far behind her was her childhood. Here was someone she scarcely knew, whose figure in the lovely clothes was graceful as a dancer's, tall and slender and grace-

ful. Did she imagine it or was her face changed too? Animated and flushed and the dimpled high place softly round and her eyes bright. *She walks in beauty like the night*—It might almost have been written of her. A faint smile was turning up the corners of her mouth. Tom had often made appropriate comments about people who had an inflated regard for their own appearance.

The change was not so much in the clothes she wore as in herself. But the clothes emphasized and pointed it out. She remembered Grandmother Falter's poem and the faint lilac perfume,

*Standing with reluctant feet*

*Where the brook and river meet . . .*

How appropriate the words seemed at this moment. The heels of her new shoes were taller than she had ever worn them. In these she would not seem so young. Philip was twenty and seemed mature to her, as old as Tom. *Why, Brook, he would say, I never knew you could be so beautiful.*

With trembling fingers she fastened the four-leaved jewel into the tiny ruffle around her neck, leaning toward the mirror. It was perfect.

They were talking together and sitting opposite

each other in the long living room. Aunt Marian faced her husband and when she turned hearing Brook come in, Brook saw that she had been quarreling with Uncle Henry. Then the angered look was made to disappear. Brook could plainly see the effort. Aunt Marian smiled.

"Lovely, Brook. As if you were posing for a picture titled 'Portrait of a Young Girl.'"

"Thank you, Aunt Marian." Brook turned to Uncle Henry. "Do you see the diamond, Uncle Henry?" She came to him and held up her head.

"Very nice, Brook," and added, surprising her, "You're very different from your mother, but there's a Stratton look about you."

Aunt Marian hadn't closely examined the small jewel and now came to look at it. "Why, Henry, where was this all the time?"

Brook could not help feeling that if Aunt Marian had known where it was, it might not have come to her at all. "Diamonds at seventeen, Brook?" Aunt Marian said. "You're doing all right. And furs. I've already given Brook my gray Persian, Henry."

"It is strange to be wearing diamonds—for me, anyway. Thank you, very much, Uncle Henry."

"It's just a little thing. Just a single small diamond, Brook. Marian, it's hers, you know. It was my

mother's—and was to go right on down in a straight line to the oldest granddaughter."

"Of course, of course." Aunt Marian looked as if she could not believe she was listening to a reproach. "Of course, Henry, if you say so."

Brook welcomed the ringing of the telephone in the hall, breaking into this hostile feeling in the air, this near-battle, the ugly scene averted, and yet it was Aunt Marian who only yesterday talked of marriage as a career. She seemed always to be close to a quarrel with her husband, as now.

"It's for you, Brook. A Long Distance call from New York," Maudie said, clearly impressed.

She ran to the phone. Thank heavens. Thank good heavens. It was only a short one this time. And now he's back. It must be Bill Cullen. Or perhaps Dad himself. And she would make an excuse, any old excuse, and run home to him.

"Hello—" she said eagerly.

"Are you having fun, Brook?" It was Tom and she was glad but it was not the same thing. Maudie must have misunderstood when the Long Distance operator said, "New Haven."

"Of course. How's New Haven?"

"What did you say? Oh, fine. Philip is here and wants to say hello later."

She took a deep breath and plunged. "Have you heard—anything at all—from Dad?"

"No," he said shortly. "Don't worry. What are you doing over there, anyway?"

"Very busy. And reading. Lots of reading."

"Improves the mind."

"Tom—I may—that is, I'm not sure when I'll be home."

"Well, make it soon. We'll be home New Year's Day. We'll be expecting you then. Above all, don't let them alienate your affections. Merry Christmas, Brook!"

"Merry Christmas, Tom. Oh, thank you for the beautiful *Biology*." It had said, *Not to be opened until Christmas if then*, but she had to look before she left. "And did you see mine for you?" She had left it in plain view with no instruction about not opening it.

"I loved it—it's my favorite present. Tell me, Brook, was it the pipe?"

"Tom, stop fooling me. Don't you really know?"

"Of course I do. It's the handsomest fluorescent desk lamp guaranteed to last five years with easily replaceable bulbs that I've ever seen. Did I say Merry Christmas? Here's Philip."

"Hello, Philip."

"We've missed you, Brook. Both of us. Don't let Tom pretend we haven't."

"I hope so."

"Brook, we've used up our money on this call. I hear ominous clicking sounds. Good-by, Brook."

"Merry Christmas, Philip."

Under the conversation with Tom her heart had turned to lead. *Have you heard anything from Dad?* she had asked. *No*, Tom had said. It wasn't going to be short this time, after all. He'd have written Tom, anyway, or been in touch with him if things were going better. Jane Sutherland had given him their addresses and if he didn't want Aunt Marian to see his handwriting—perhaps it wasn't steady enough—he'd have written Tom. Thinking it over Tom hadn't sounded as gay as he meant to sound, she was certain. *What are you doing there, anyway?* he asked. What really was she doing here anyway? If Aunt Marian had anything to say about it she'd be here forever, for the rest of her days. It was something she'd got herself into and she would get herself out, in spite of the wonderful clothes—all the wonderful clothes that she wished at the bottom of the sea—the clothes, and the diamond, another part of the net to hold her fast, a whole net of gifts. She put her

hand to the place where the little clover-leaf was pinned.

"How is Tom?" asked Uncle Henry.

"Seems to be enjoying himself," she said, closing her fingers on the little clover-leaf.

Uncle Henry stood there in the festive room looking oddly out of place, a serious, thin-faced man, gray at the temples, and contemplatively nodding as he heard the news about Tom. For the first time in her life, it seemed to Brook, she was looking straight at Uncle Henry and it was exactly as if she were meeting him for the first time. It came to her, as if light had illuminated a place long in darkness, that Uncle Henry had the air of a greatly disappointed man. There was a great deal wrong and if Tom were here he would be almost certain to say that whatever is wrong with Uncle Henry is Aunt Marian. If you looked closely, Uncle Henry even resembled her mother.

She was discovering Uncle Henry, and it now seemed to her that she would like to take a long walk with him, perhaps down to the sea, as she had done by herself, and listen to him tell her enough about himself so that she would know him for a person wholly aside from and different from his wife, Marian Stratton.

"Brook, dear," Aunt Marian called to her from across the room, "please see how Maudie's getting on in the kitchen and tell her to be sure to shut the kitchen door between courses."

She went into the kitchen and Maudie clasped her hands together. "Why, you're simply gorgeous, Brook. You're just gorgeous."

Aunt Marian had been right. Maudie seemed delighted with her hat. She put it on for Brook who regarded it with surprise in its role as accessory to the kitchen apron Maudie wore.

"It's most becoming, Maudie."

"Like a masquerade," said Maudie, leaving Brook to wonder.

There was the sound of the front door-bell ringing, a series of deep-toned, well-bred chimes. Looking up at the kitchen clock Brook saw it was 3:00 on the stroke. The Cottens were absolutely dependable. Brook imagined them, like the figures in "American Gothic" and in the same apparel, standing on the porch waiting for Mr. Cotten's watch to say 3:00.

Maudie reverently removed her hat and laid it in its box high on a kitchen cabinet and hurried out to answer the door-chimes.

"Brook Falter, our young niece," Aunt Marian said, introducing her. "She's here to keep us com-

pany." Uncle Henry offered some Dubonnet to the Cottens who were, far from looking like "American Gothic," a bit oversized, width and height as well.

Mr. Cotten raised his glass and said, "Oh, come, Henry, a glass for the young Lady Brook, so we can toast youth and beauty. All the beauties, in fact." He hastily included his wife and Aunt Marian in a wide badly-calculated sweeping arm motion that met with a bit of Christmas decoration. He was definitely subdued by Aunt Marian's lack of response.

"Now what have I done?" Mr. Cotten's prominent eyes focused in distress on Aunt Marian.

"We never offer liquor to young people," Aunt Marian said, "on general principles." She leaned slightly toward him to add, "Especially to a Falter." She made no effort to keep her voice from reaching Brook who felt as if someone had hovered a hot branding iron over her.

Mr. Cotten edged over to Brook and did his best to apologize for something he hadn't done. It was entirely in his manner, however, for he was talking about tennis that he apparently loved to play about twenty years ago.

Brook was grateful.

"Do you play a pretty good game of tennis, Brook?"

You don't mind if I call you Brook?" said Mr. Cotten.

"I don't mind at all, Mr. Cotten. And my game of tennis isn't much."

"Not much? Well, what about badminton? Now *there's* a game to take off excess poundage. Not that you'd have that trouble." Mr. Cotten laughed a high thin laugh not at all in keeping with his size.

Mrs. Cotten joined her husband in keeping Brook company and Brook, feeling she was monopolizing Mr. Cotten, made conversation directed at Mrs. Cotten.

"My father taught me to play chess when I was seven. Do you play chess?"

"No," said Mrs. Cotten, seeming to be affronted by the idea, "no, indeed not."

"No highbrow games or longhair music," Mr. Cotten added. "Do you mean to say you like that sort of thing?"

"As a matter of fact I'm not good at chess. Tom, he's my brother, allows his attention to wander purposely when he plays with me. It's the only way I ever manage to get an occasional game."

Aunt Marian came to them to show some photographs of the house in the first November snowfall. So far, she emphatically stated, it had been the coldest fall and beginning of winter since they'd settled in

Sea Point some years ago. Remember it wasn't January yet!

Through the door into the living room Brook saw Uncle Henry putting back ends of tinsel and straightening the disarrayed tree after the presents had been removed. She wanted very much to detach herself from Mr. and Mrs. Cotten and join Uncle Henry but now Maudie appeared in the doorway and looked round, having apparently forgotten what she'd come to say. Then, recollecting herself, whispered inaudibly, "Dinner," and signaled to Aunt Marian by pointing to the table, and disappeared.

At the table Aunt Marian said to Brook, "Do relax. Don't sit on the edge of your chair. We're all old friends."

"I'm a checkers man myself," Mr. Cotten said, picking up the dropped thread of their conversation.

Uncle Henry catching Brook's eye said, "Pretty breathless stuff, Herbert."

Mr. Cotten was not a bit dissuaded from telling about his checkers exploits. He had once played with a Russian, apparently, and had been much impressed. "Skipped back and forth all over the place. 'I'll eat you,' the Russian said. 'I'll eat you.'"

Aunt Marian laughed. "Did he?"

"Russian lady," Herbert Cotten said, glancing

from the safe distance of diagonally opposite, at his wife, who stared at him in alarm. "Used to be the terror of my class. Beat everybody. Terrific. Took on three at a time."

"Blindfolded?" Uncle Henry asked, and again Brook had the distinct feeling that Uncle Henry was trying for her sake to lighten the proceedings.

"Well, Henry, how could anyone tell the colors blindfolded?" Herbert Cotten rested his case.

If she went off leaving a note for Aunt Marian, Brook was thinking, a note that explained why she had to go back home at once, perhaps Aunt Marian would understand and not feel too bad about her leaving. As long as she was so close to graduation at the South Ebury school it was hardly worth changing. Also there was a great deal left undone at home and she had a sense of time running away from her while she spent her days idly here. All that would be impossible to tell Aunt Marian, so it was necessary to put it all into a letter. While she listened to Mr. Cotten, she composed a note for Aunt Marian.

Of course she would have to leave the taffeta suit. But about the pin that had belonged to Grandmother Stratton she was less certain. The pin according to Uncle Henry was meant for her. *Dear Aunt Marian,* she composed, *and Uncle Henry, Please forgive me*

*for leaving. I don't feel I should break up my last school year and so I had better remain with my family. I want to say how grateful I am for everything and although I enjoyed wearing these new lovely clothes I feel I have no right to them and I am leaving them in the closet. And Uncle Henry, of course I cannot take the clover-leaf pin but I do appreciate your offering it to me. Forgive me if I have caused you any inconvenience—or worry. I am sorry, Aunt Marian, about not being able to help you as I had planned. Ever, Brook.*

She did not like the note and started another. The first was wrong in its spirit. She felt it wasn't truthful, for she was leaving because there was nothing else she could do but go back home. It wasn't because of Aunt Marian. If she had been a thousand times more considerate and gentle, she would still have had to go back to them.

From the bottom of her heart she was sorry for Aunt Marian, now that she knew she had been playing the game of pretending Brook was her daughter. Poor, lonely Aunt Marian who was putting a brave hard front on everything she did and who was cross and meddling and petty most of the time. Yet she had meant well for her, along with the good she meant for herself. Brook was certain she was a great

disappointment to Aunt Marian. Perhaps Aunt Marian would be rather glad to be rid of her. She hoped so. Now for a plan of action. There was an eight o'clock going the other way, too. To South Ebury. Perhaps with Maudie's help—no, better not involve Maudie or Maudie would have too much to answer for. It would hurt to leave Maudie.

Everyone was laughing and Mrs. Cotten, as usual feeling her husband was ridiculous, turned to Brook and away from her husband and asked her what she intended to do when she was out of school. "Have you chosen your college?"

Mrs. Cotten did not share Aunt Marian's views about higher education. Brook turned to Mrs. Cotten with enthusiasm. "There are at least four scholarships I'm going to try for in the spring term. So it's more a matter of a college choosing me than the other way round. We have a teacher who has made us see the importance of the whole field of biology and chemistry. She thinks I would do well in biology, perhaps go on to bio-chemistry. My brother's going into journalism, that is, he's in it already. Tom's a very good writer."

Aunt Marian nodded to Maudie and Maudie brought the soup. Brook, taking a spoonful, while giving Mrs. Cotten a brief outline of Tom's plans,

failed to see that Aunt Marian had not yet begun to eat. Now, glancing at Aunt Marian, she put her soup spoon hastily down on the tablecloth forgetting that it had already been in the soup. A large widening stain appeared on the pale gray damask and Aunt Marian stared at it. In the silence, the soup-spot appeared to take on the character of a major disaster. Uncle Henry looked over his plate at it, also, but more casually, and Mrs. Cotten followed their glance, but Mr. Cotten went happily on.

"Journalism's great stuff. Molds the public mind. Great stuff. Opportunity for good. Or the opposite." He laughed at his own turn of fancy. "Naturally a good journalist can mold the public mind to his way of thinking but what about a good journalist with bad ideas?" He looked around but found only pre-occupation and no answering recognition of his wit.

Brook attempted to cover up the catastrophe of the soup-spot in a rapid conversation that clung to the subject of journalism. "Well, what Tom says is that there isn't enough emphasis in the news upon the right things. Science, for instance, and art. He believes in an international exchange of ideas." But in her mind Brook was beginning a new short letter. It seemed to her she had known what she must write

because the words came so readily, *I am going home, Aunt Marian, because I must stay with Father and Tom. I think they need me and I'm sure I need them.*

Aunt Marian had touched the little silver bell for Maudie and somehow had conveyed the news telegraphically to Maudie and now she came in once more bringing a large white napkin to cover the soup-spot.

"Children must be children, I suppose," Aunt Marian said. There was no way of knowing whether her remark related to the conversation or to the spot on the table cloth or to Mr. Cotten at whom Aunt Marian was now looking rather steadily.

Uncle Henry poured the wine that was to accompany the turkey. Across the table he reached for Mrs. Cotten's glass. Maudie had set a glass beside Brook's place and, unaccountably, Aunt Marian had not observed it. She removed it now and handed it to Maudie, shaking her head. There was a long silence and Mr. Cotten, at last effectively crushed, showed deep interest in the sliced turkey on his plate. Brook wrote a postscript to her letter. *I feel I have upset your household routine and I'm sure you would be regretting it yourselves very soon, if I stayed. I've left the clothing hanging up in the closet*

*but I think Uncle Henry would like me to take Grandmother Stratton's clover-leaf pin.*

The conversation had turned to the lateness of the commuters' trains. "There's been absolutely no improvement in train service since the war," said Aunt Marian, "and you know how long ago that is."

Maudie cleared away and returned bearing a fruit cake.

From the hall there came the sound of the door chimes, muffled and melodious. Maudie, serving Mrs. Cotten, straightened up jerkily, and was torn between the dessert plates and the door chimes which to Maudie, in spite of their muffled politeness, still carried the undeniable command, Answer as quickly as possible.

Maudie's hand waved in mid-air with a dessert plate in it, while her eyes fastened themselves upon Aunt Marian. They looked at each other antagonistically for a moment. Aunt Marian made the decision. "The door, please, Maudie. Whoever it is, please explain dinner is being served. We expect no one I know of." And to Brook Aunt Marian said, "Please pass the plates singly, Brook."

There was a vague presentiment in Brook's heart. This was, obviously, troublesome to Aunt Marian, and many troublesome things, it seemed to Brook,

originated with herself. Perhaps this, too, had some connection with—*herself*. Now she recognized the voice that was borne in through three intervening rooms. And fright began to take hold of her. But could it be? Could it possibly be?

Maudie, from all she gathered, was striving to shepherd him into the living room, but he was insistently opposed to this. She heard him, in trembling silence. He was patiently telling Maudie that it was perfectly proper for him to come into the dining-room to see his brother-in-law and sister-in-law, particularly as his daughter, Brook, was here. Visiting.

THE Strattons appeared permanently frozen into their places and Mrs. Cotten glanced apprehensively at her hostess. Only Herbert Cotten remained blandly unaware of possible upheaval. He smiled engagingly at Sam Falter and Sam Falter, seeing in him a fellow human being, greeted him with a nod. Mrs. Cotten looked now as if her worst fears were being confirmed.

"How do you do," Sam Falter said, and as Uncle Henry rose slowly, "Be seated, Henry. I'll drop into a chair. Sorry I've disturbed you."

Brook said, "Hello, Dad," and glanced at Aunt Marian and hastily looked away. Aunt Marian wore the expression of a china-shop proprietor meeting face-to-face the china-smashing bull.

Brook and her father looked at each other for a

long moment and he nodded his head slightly as if to reassure her. And she was reassured. He was all right. She was suddenly, unreasonably, happy. He was perfectly all right, yet he looked very bad, she thought, his eyes deep-sunken, and his pallor unnatural. He was wearing his dark clothes, not the usual tweeds. Perhaps that was why he seemed pale to her and thinner.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cotten," Uncle Henry said heavily, "my brother-in-law, Mr. Falter. Brook's father," he added.

"Oh, is that so?" Mr. Cotten amiably said. "Well, glad to know you." His wife silenced him with a look indicating here was obviously the beginning of a family crisis.

The men stood to shake hands and Maudie, breathing quickly after her struggle against invasion, served coffee. Having served them all at the table, Maudie poured a cup for Brook's father and, looking neither to right nor left, brought it to him in silence, and then returned to the table, cut a large slice of fruit cake and brought it to him, also. Her expression was defiant. "This is on my own," it clearly stated. "I boldly assume the responsibility."

It was without precedent and Aunt Marian stared in amazement at Maudie who was deliberately re-

fusing to meet Aunt Marian's disapproving frown, and had begun to act on her own and in an uncontrolled manner.

"Do you care for a cup of coffee, Sam?" Aunt Marian said helplessly.

"I don't mind," he said and took the cake, also.

The silence grew oppressive and Mr. Cotten cleared his throat a few times.

Sam Falter said, "Don't let me put a damper on all the festivities. Go ahead, talk. Pretend I'm not here. I want a word with Brook later, that's all."

"Brook is free, this moment. She's refused her dessert and the sunroom is very cosy in the late afternoon. Perhaps you two would go in there while we go to the living-room." Aunt Marian was looking at Brook and addressing Sam Falter. It had an uncanny effect as if she were communicating through a medium at a séance.

Brook said, "May I be excused then?"

"Certainly, Brook."

"Or perhaps Brook would like to walk out with me. It's a fine afternoon for a walk."

Brook was eager to walk.

"Just remember, Sam," Aunt Marian said, to the astonishment of the Cottens, "they don't allow

minors in taverns." Aunt Marian's eyelid was fluttering furiously.

Her father stood and said in a friendly way, to the further unbounded astonishment of the Cottens and possible delight of Mr. Cotten, "Don't be a dramatic fool, Marian. At least not so much of the time."

"I'll expect you in an hour, Brook. Or I'll be worried."

"Please don't worry, Aunt Marian." She turned to the Cottens, "In case you're gone when—"

"But they won't be gone, Brook. Now get your fur coat and be sure you are warm enough. It's very penetrating. We'll probably have charades when you return." She had not yet looked directly at Sam Falter.

"Good afternoon," he said, "Mr. and Mrs. Cotten. Henry—Marian."

The town of Sea Point, laid out in small circular drives, was planned so that nearly every house was concealed from its neighbor in summer, but now, with leafless trees, the houses in the afternoon sun were warm islands of light, each clearly visible. All of them looked settled and self-satisfied and, to Brook, as though they wanted no intruders.

She slipped her arm into her father's arm as they

walked toward Main Street. She could not interrupt the contented silence they shared, to ask him why he had come. Perhaps he would soon tell her.

Sea Point was larger and wealthier and far newer than South Ebury, judging from its numerous modern shops that were gaily decorated now for the holiday. At the end of Main Street, he stopped and stood irresolutely for a moment, then said abruptly, "What I have to say will take only a minute, Brook. I'm going to be away from home for the next few months. I'm going to make the effort to cure myself of what's wrong with me. Perhaps we better call it frankly a disease. It is treated as such. However long it will be will depend upon me, of course. No one else. I'm not much good to either of you as I am. Or to myself. I'm not going to make a promise yet. Now, the point is, shall we go back to your Aunt Marian's or would you rather go home?" It had cost him an enormous effort to say it. Tiny beads of perspiration stood on his forehead in spite of the cold.

Had he really said it? Was she hearing it exactly as he had said it? He had spoken shortly and quickly and she longed to hear him repeat it slowly. A chilling thought swept her mind. Would there be, once more, a long absence translated later when a letter in the form of a bill from a sanitarium arrived? Had

he told her mother this very thing? There had been many long absences. Her mind was full of questioning and doubt.

"Tom and Jane Sutherland are coming home this afternoon," he said.

"They are?" How had they managed to come back so soon? But she couldn't stop to think about them now.

"On the chance you've had enough of Sea Point."

"I'd much rather go home, Dad. Much."

"Good," he said.

They walked back to the brightly lighted corner drug store and her head was spinning with fears and doubts and hopes, the hopes struggling and at last narrowly winning over the fears and the doubts.

"I'll telephone Aunt Marian." She looked down at herself still wearing Aunt Marian's gifts, green taffeta suit and gray fur coat. "I'll telephone her," she decided quickly. "And return these by mail." I'll make it up to her later, somehow, she thought, but first I must go home with Dad. Simply must.

"Aren't they yours?"

She shook her head. "I was never so grand."

Seated at a small table, he waited for her outside the phone booth. Leaving him, Brook was hurt by his unhappy look. He was suffering, she was certain.

The hand that held his hat trembled noticeably. But she had heard him say the words she had longed to hear him say. He himself had said them. And to her.

She could not believe Aunt Marian would be so angry.

"You are being as thoroughly irresponsible as *he* is."

"You don't know, Aunt Marian—" but she checked herself. Even he had not been willing to make a promise yet. "Tom's at home. And Mrs. Sutherland."

"Do you believe him?"

"Why, of course."

"Uncle Henry will come along."

"Oh, no, please, Aunt Marian." She put her mouth close to the receiver. "We must hurry. He doesn't look well."

"Probably in need of a drink," Aunt Marian said. Brook had been thinking that too, but Aunt Marian's stating it baldly didn't help. Probably, Brook thought, but he is trying not to think about it. I know.

Aunt Marian's voice was coming to her as a far-away, bitter sound. "You're very sure of yourself, aren't you, Brook?"

"Please don't be angry, Aunt Marian."

When she came out of the phone booth he had ordered coca colas for both of them. They sipped them slowly while she thought disquietedly of the problem of money. Perhaps he hadn't any and after the gifts for Uncle Henry and Maudie she had exactly fifty cents. He took out his wallet to pay for their drinks and she saw, with relief, there were several bills in it.

"You had a battle on your hands, didn't you?" he asked. "Who won?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm going home."

After a careful search, they found a taxi at the station that would undertake to bring them to South Ebury for five dollars.

He occupied most of the taxicab seat. Sitting in her corner she wanted most of all to be reassured again but could not think of a way to put her wish into words. And also she was deeply grateful he had come, grateful particularly that she hadn't had to write the letter to Aunt Marian, after all.

"Well, Brook." He half-turned to her. "Are you planning to make a habit of being rescued? Are you the fair princess who gets up in a tower and has a whole bookful of adventures before she is brought

down to her rightful kingdom? This adventure, for example, involves a 120-horsepower motor. I am being optimistic, perhaps. It sounds more like half a horse. Also five dollars in coin of the realm. If I hadn't the good sense to establish a flat rate our highwayman here would have let the meter run on and on." He gestured widely.

She was smiling up at him from her corner and recognized a little of his old early self in his voice. She remembered suddenly how Aunt Marian had looked when her father had come into the dining room. Thoroughly outraged, Brook thought. It was the only way one could describe her startled blue eyes. Outraged, as in one of the games that Sue's family played named "Facial Expressions of Birds, Beasts, and Men."

"Did you have a terrible time at the Strattons?"

"No," she said slowly. "They tried very hard to make me feel at home. A room of my own and these lovely clothes—"

"And you were a sympathetic ear, or at any rate, an ear. Someone to help keep that idle mind from boredom."

"I'm afraid not. I literally spilled the soup and misbehaved generally. Then this—leavetaking."

"Never mind."

"I was getting ready to come back home. I wasn't going to stay."

"Can't you even let me *pretend* I rescued you?" Then he said in a low voice, "You're not saying it to make me feel better about this?"

"I was planning to leave. I suppose I should say—run away. I missed our family and I have a bad conscience about leaving you. Also I ought to be on hand to help in case Jane Sutherland should decide to go elsewhere."

"All the same the things your aunt's been saying are true, Brook. Most of them anyway."

"She exaggerates," Brook said.

"Perhaps. She's had a poor opinion of me for a long time, however. I'm afraid it's been borne out by the facts."

Yes, it had been a long time. She remembered that fireside talk and Uncle Henry's trite little rhyme that had remained with her for almost all her life.

"But in the beginning," he said, "they had a fine opinion of me. The *Herald-Telegraph* is a respected paper, and I was a young journalist starting at the top. The truth is I hated it and wanted to do something big and brilliant. Ultimate truths, profound, witty conversations."

She was listening to a continued recital now. It wasn't any longer the putting together of things overheard or remembered. This was how it had happened.

"I'd leave the paper," he said, "for a while and begin writing this heroic novel and days would go by and months and none of it got written. Or when it did was promptly torn up. Then I was back at the paper hating it even more. But all those brilliant conversations I was going to write always hovered in the background and were on the point of being captured so long as I was having a series of whisky straights.

"I had the whisky straights and admired the conversations I could write but, as anyone could have told me and often did, I never got to writing them down. The next morning the conversations seemed pretty bad, certainly the ones I could remember. Anyway, I'd got into the habit of needing the drinks. You know about the Falters. It's an easy habit for the men in the family to acquire. Short history of my literary life," he concluded and looked down at her. "Are you asleep yet?"

"I'm listening."

"Very well. Tell me when you fall asleep."

"All right," she said. A light snow had begun and

clung to the windows and blurred the outside world into wavering darkness.

"You may hear it said one day that a remarkable surgeon is even more remarkable when he's had a few, or a writer, or perhaps they say it about a tight-rope performer, for all I know. That's disastrous nonsense. Austin Dobson wrote the last word about it."

He took a deep breath, audibly, and began:

*So I drink of the Ale of Southwark, I drink of the  
Ale of Chepe;  
All day I dream in the sunlight; I dream and eke I  
weep,  
For little lore of loving can any flagon teach,  
For when my tongue is loosed most, then most I  
lose my speech.*

"Or skill," he added, "or whatever bit of ability one has to begin with."

He had said the lines as if he had written them, and she had closed her eyes to listen to the music of his voice, as long ago she had listened enchantedly to his mother's voice telling her

*I give my whole self a shake, shake, shake, and turn  
myself around.*

"A poet can make poetry of any dreary subject," Sam Falter said. "Well, I found I'd never write that probing, world-shaking book. It was about the time when you were born that she lost confidence in me utterly and completely."

He was no longer talking about Aunt Marian. He was talking about her mother and his few words called her to mind instantly and vividly.

"Nothing succeeds like success, Brook. And nothing quite fails like failure. Really complete, resounding failure. 'Never mind,' she would say. I'd work on my own for a solid year and look over the dismal stuff I'd written and then she'd say, 'Never mind,' and urge me to start all over again. And offer me the money I'd have had if I'd written a memorable, worthwhile book. I'd use the money because, I argued, it was related to the book. The thing about drinking is, it makes you lie to yourself. *It* begins to do your thinking. Drinking does your thinking." There was a long pause.

And all the time she had been listening she could see her mother's face with the dimple in the high place over the right cheekbone.

"I'd use the money, but not in the way she meant. 'Never mind,' she'd say again. 'They'll be glad to see you back on the paper.' I'd go back and then get

to thinking and, in the usual way which was soon the habitual way, try to forget the whole humiliating business. I don't have to tell you she had magnificent courage to put up with me.

"Anyway I couldn't just do a good job on the paper and let it go at that. I had to look toward the mountains of the moon and wish I had a way of scaling them. Tom has imagination, too, but it's a different sort. And he doesn't compromise. I wish he could change that miserable little paper into something worthwhile. Just as he wants to. I'd like to help him do it. Somehow."

It gave her an odd slipping feeling to hear Tom compared with himself. And she hoped he was right. With all her heart she hoped Tom wouldn't compromise.

"I could never say I wasn't understood at home. Of course I was. Only too well. But knowing your limitations and then having them pointed out—that's where Aunt Marian comes in—has a bad effect. You know, Brook, I hate bitterness. I hate this kind of searching on my part. That's the job Paul Thatcher is doing. I went to see him. He knows everything about what makes people drink and what makes them stop drinking and keeps them away from it. I'm seeing him three times a week from now on.

Anyway you're coming home and that's the big thing. For a long lonely moment I thought I'd lost you. Driver," he leaned forward and said with urgency, "can you get us home fast?"

"Sure."

"Well—get going." The urgency dropped out of his voice and he turned back to Brook. "I didn't want to be a pathetic figure," he said, "yet there it was every time in her eyes."

Brook knew it well, all of it. The sound of the cab slowing down and the clock ticking away, and the white-faced look, the white-faced courageous look.

It seemed to her suddenly that this was the end of a long struggle. He had taken the first long step. He, himself, had taken it. No one else had taken it for him. Whatever it was had been vanquished, like an old haunting fear, like an old ill-tempered giant. He had begun to fight the battle and meant to go on fighting it. *After today—after this, nothing can bring back the old.*

They were nearing home. She saw the lights of Winterside Drive as they rounded the corner. A bar of light fell across his face and she saw him look at her apologetically.

"Another thing, Brook. I've had to leave the job to give this full-time attention. There's a little

quarterly sum that comes in. It's your mother's money. And there's a lump sum each of you will have on your next birthdays. Of course there won't be enough for Jane Sutherland. Do you think you can do the managing at home? It'll only be until I'm back on the job. They've always wanted me back before."

She almost preferred the sort of bluster he had used with Aunt Marian. She did not want to be sorry for him, as her mother had been. Wanted him to be proud and self-assured and, as though he had read her thought, his voice was changed and more confident now.

"Maybe I'll take a job on a paper that isn't quite so familiar with my personal life in the past as the *Herald*. There may even be, conceivably, a better job elsewhere. We'll see. At any rate you understand it's not anything that can be done overnight. I've got to stick to a strict program for a long time. Perhaps six months, perhaps longer. I'm staying at a Y near Paul Thatcher's." He handed Brook his fountain pen and a small pad that he took out of his inner pocket. "Put the address down, Brook." She knew he wanted her to write it because his hand was too unsteady.

She could not understand all of it, neither the depth of the need nor the bottomless dissatisfaction

with himself nor the desire for the heavy forgetfulness. Not all of it, but most. She saw it had taken her mother's death and Tom's future and her own absence from home—perhaps a great deal more—to awaken him. And he wanted now to shoulder his burden of responsibility. The name, Paul Thatcher, engraved itself on her mind. Wherever he is, whoever he is, Brook thought gratefully, thank heaven for him.

"Wait for me," Sam Falter said to the taxi driver.

He walked with her up the footpath to the door and they listened to Brush begin his joyous barking on the other side. They looked at each other and smiled.

"I'll leave you here," he said.

"Not even coming in for a moment?"

"Not even for a moment. It really is a strict schedule. I had to see you. More than anything I hoped you'd come home. I couldn't bear to think of you there."

He wanted them all to be together. He wanted her here. He would work toward it, then. She was grateful, therefore, to Aunt Marian, too, who in an oblique way had helped them all. "I couldn't ever stay there," she repeated, "ever again, away from home."

All at once she knew something she had not known ten minutes before. It seemed decided for her and she recognized the decision had just been born. The career that had been vague and indeterminate and far off in the future was clear and as if she had read it in simple sentences of instruction. I must find out the *why* of this disease. At least I must try. When does it begin? I must find out what goes wrong at the very beginning. What is the first step—and the next—and where is the turning point, and above all, what about the return?

She put aside her insistent crowding thoughts as she bid him good-by but determined to talk to Dr. Davitt soon.

He stood undecided for a single moment and she turned up her face to him and kissed him. She remembered briefly the repugnance she had felt. Now there was only the old affection of her early childhood, as if all that had intervened had never been. He took her hand and held it tightly for a moment before he released it. "You've a good friend in Philip Cantrell. So have I."

"Philip? Philip Cantrell?" She looked questioningly at her father.

"He'll tell you as much as he wants to," he said.

"Are you taking the taxi into the city?" she asked.

"I'd better," he said quickly. "Directly to Paul Thatcher's." He bent and kissed her again and walked hurriedly back to the waiting cab.

Tom was beginning the run downstairs that shook the house.

"Hi—Brook. Was that Dad?"

"Yes. He's going to New York at once."

"I know," he said.

"You do? Tom, you've grown three inches."

"It's only that the house is shrinking. You look pretty good."

"Do I? Do you know about everything? And what's this about Philip? Are you feeling as happy—and turned inside out—as I am?"

"Philip—" Tommy was being restrained. "Philip," he said quietly, "is a worker of miracles. It was Philip who told Dad about Paul Thatcher." He took a deep breath. "Get your things off. Are they borrowed? Or is Aunt Marian now generously giving away fur coats?"

"It's only one, but it'll have to be returned all the same. I was supposed to work it out and instead I ran away."

"You might be hurting the old girl, sending it back to her."

"Well, it's going back." She was removing her hat when Jane Sutherland came quickly downstairs.

"Why, Brook, you look wonderful. How did you get back?"

"Father brought me—a few minutes ago."

"And left?" She looked disturbed but Brook could not tell her yet. No outsider must know, as if by telling, the tenuous spell might be broken. She nodded instead.

Jane Sutherland continued to look questioningly at her and Brook suspected what the question was, but she could not answer it except to say, "He's going to New York for a while. Not at the Club," she added hastily.

"I know," Aunt Jane said. "I just wondered if he wouldn't have rather had someone along for company on the trip."

So Aunt Jane knew too. Well then, so much the better. It wouldn't need telling. Nothing could take away from the happiness that was warming her.

Aunt Jane said shyly, "Wouldn't you like to see your presents? They're up in your room waiting."

The house was shining and warm and smelling of good food. Aunt Jane had managed to keep it exactly the same home Brook had always known. The same and yet not the same. Never the same again—so long

as memory lasts. She thought about the resentment she'd felt after Aunt Marian's talk, but thinking about it could not call it up. It had disappeared.

"Tell me about New Haven, Tommy," she said.

"Tell me about Aunt Marian and her generous streak," he said. "And is Maudie still hiding from pursuers?"

Aunt Jane suggested hot drinks and when they came into the kitchen she had prepared a plate of piled sandwiches. They could stay up until midnight if they chose, she said, but as for her she was tired and going to bed. For the rest of the week she preferred to stay with them, if they didn't mind, as traveling had become very bad after the storm, particularly at this late hour.

After Aunt Jane left them together, Brook said thoughtfully, "Do you think it will work, this time?" All the quick confidence had left her suddenly. "I was very sure a little while ago."

Tom said, "Did he tell you about Paul Thatcher?"

"A little."

"I didn't ever meet Thatcher, but Philip did. Thatcher thinks there's a good chance of success." But Tommy wasn't convincing her and, suddenly, all the quiet joy that had gathered in her heart

drained away from her, and instead there was foreboding once more.

"I can't help feeling, somehow, as if this is our last chance. And his."

"Perhaps it is," Tom said. There was little in his manner to raise her hopes.

"He promised to write. I have his address."

"I hope we can tell from letters," Tom said.

Her hopes rose somewhat as she remembered her decision and she was determined to be hopeful. "I think we'll know from the letters. We'll have to trust Thatcher and Dad, too. Tom, as I was listening to him tell me his plans, I decided something too, or perhaps it was more as if something were decided for me. It's a problem we already know from personal experience. I want to study more about it. I thought of it as a career for me. Not alone Dad, but everyone who's ever been tormented, as he has, ought to be helped."

"You too? Philip's been talking of nothing else all the time we've been together. He thinks problem drinking is only one phase of a larger problem—but he's determined to do research in the subject, beginning with the physical and on and up. I can't remember anything else he talked about. We left New Haven the same day we arrived—that was Sunday.

Philip made some excuse or other and we went down to New York together. Philip at once saw Thatcher and then Dad. Then made arrangements for them to meet."

It had been New York, then, on Long Distance, as Maudie had said. "I wonder why Philip was interested," she said, and added, "I thought we'd kept the secret pretty well."

"It's not possible in a town this size. It's not possible in any town, anywhere. Anyone can see. Everyone has seen. Mother knew that. For instance, you met Philip the evening he had his letter from Yale—and that was the evening—"

Yes, she remembered that evening very well.

"Philip came back here with me, afterward," Tommy said. "I guess he saw you looking white and scared and put all the facts together. You did look terrible, Brook, when I saw you over at the Willeys'. Anyway, Philip's wrapped up in it like in an Indian blanket, head to foot. He's been reading all the books ever written on the subject of drinking."

She remembered the afternoon at the library and the titles Philip had kept her from seeing. "I've been wanting to read them myself," she said.

"I never felt as you did, Brook. It used to seem to me part of his kind of life."

She was about to ask him something that was very important to her and because it was so important she made it sound offhand. "Do you still think so?"

"No," he said. He was altogether in earnest. "Not after I saw that it made him think a certain way, not after it began to change him and made him find excuses for drinking."

*Drinking does your thinking*, her father had said. And Tom saw it too. In all the times she had talked with Tom about it, edging around the thing, as long ago as she could remember, all their conversations ended with Tom's saying, "Well, we ought to be used to it by now." There'd been a change. Tom, this time, had thought it through. There was no feeling of overlooking it anywhere, of being forgiving and tolerant of it, of being reticent or bewildered by it. Tom was facing it too, wasn't taking it for granted any more.

Upstairs in her own room, and all but forgotten, were three small packages and long before Brook opened them she knew she would not have exchanged these for all the presents there had been under the Stratton tree. She opened the largest of them first and was overjoyed to discover her long-lost leopard. There was a card hung round his neck.

"You have the look of a person in need of a leopard. Accept this rugged example, please, with all my love. *Sue*." And there were Jane Sutherland's delightful, kitten-soft, warm red knitted mittens, and because the writing was familiar to her, she opened the third package with hands that were all thumbs. In the jeweler's box there was a slender and long golden initial B, "With every good wish from P. C." She flew to the mirror with it. It could be worn on the lapel of her coat or on a sweater and there was a tiny ring at the top so it could be slipped on a bracelet chain or a chain around her neck. It was easily to be the most cherished of the gifts. Easily, and yet even the thought of Philip's gift took second place to the thought of the words she had heard her father say today, "I'm going to make the effort . . ."

THERE followed long white days of shining blinding sun on trackless snowbound roads. They were days for plowing through on foot to Frog Pond, occasionally with either Sue or Tom, most often alone with Brush for company. Brook made her plans on these walks.

Aunt Jane would be leaving early in January and there would be only Tommy and herself to provide for. She was past seventeen. Grandmother Falter had been married at sixteen, so actually she, Brook, was taking over far fewer responsibilities than that young lady had undertaken. She meant to put down a list of things to do in the order in which Aunt Jane did them, then follow the list exactly. As for money to pay for running the house, there would be the quarterly payments that would come to them beginning

with January. Perhaps by the time Tom was through with school in June, Dad would be back at the paper.

She had to be firm with herself to shut out the doubts that besieged her. Suppose it took longer than June—and suppose . . . She faced it with an effort of will—suppose it failed. All her strength seemed to go out of her body. You could undertake anything if you thought it would succeed. You could do anything if there were reward at the end, but suppose you felt there was more than a little chance of failure. Could you still go on? Could you still borrow courage as she had that long-ago day at Frog Pond? Could you borrow courage and plod ahead as she was doing this instant? You can, Brook, she told herself on these walks. You can and you shall.

Aunt Marian's things, tenderly wrapped and carefully weighed and insured and posted were all promptly returned without a word from Aunt Marian, as Tommy had almost predicted they would be. Brook shook them out carefully after their travels and hung them up in her closet and could not help secretly being glad they were back, thinking, illogically, "Well, at least, I *tried* to return them. I'll somehow make it up to Aunt Marian some day." Brook pondered ways and abandoned them and again thought, it'll come to me. I'll find some way to re-

pay her for these to show her I'm grateful. Any other way, in fact, but the way she suggested.

At the end of January, Philip was going up to New Haven for a term of preliminary work and perhaps there'd be a party for him at the Cantrells'. She planned to wear her suit if she were asked by Philip to come, although Philip, lately, was avoiding her, she thought.

There was no word of a party, after all, nor did he telephone. When they met by accident he was not unfriendly but impersonal, and managed to be in a hurry. Perhaps he was right. She could not possibly have veered the subject away from her father, and, on the other hand, could not possibly have talked to Philip about him.

Aunt Jane had put off leaving for another week and Brook studied, in the meantime, figures and schedules. The day before Aunt Jane was to leave, Brook pasted up a house schedule inside the broom closet-door and Tom typed a week's shopping list for her. He came down with it and put it into the right-hand drawer of the kitchen cabinet.

The radio was on and he turned it up slightly. They recognized Quincy Howe's voice and the Science series they had both been listening to.

"Here's the picture," he was saying. "Fifty million Americans drink some alcohol. Three million drink to excess. Seven or eight hundred thousand—and the number is growing—are problem drinkers. What turns a person into a problem drinker?"

Tom had stopped rattling the shopping list he was fitting into the drawer and stood listening and Brook stared at the radio riveting her attention on what he was saying. "Dr. Roger J. Williams of the University of Texas read a paper before the American Association for the Advancement of Science Convention stressing heredity rather than environment, physical rather than nervous, causes of alcoholism . . ."

In the bright cheerful kitchen, Brook and Tom stood, neither looking at the other. He is talking about our family—about our problem, she thought. *Three million drink to excess . . . seven or eight hundred thousand—and the number is growing—are problem drinkers . . .* And one of them is our father. *What turns a person into a problem drinker?* he had asked over the radio. She would try to answer that question one day, she hoped, and attempt to apply that answer.

"Heredity," Tommy said when Quincy Howe had finished, "is having something arranged for you. I consider it an interference with personal liberty."

She had that same slipping, helpless feeling she had had for a moment when her father had talked about Tom's being like himself.

"If so much is known about it, we ought to be able to fight it." She tried to put firmness into her voice. But for a long time she stood looking down at her daily schedule, thinking about Tommy and what he'd said about heredity.

Aunt Jane baked a cake the next day. It stood plump and self-satisfied looking and begged for admiration.

"Don't attempt anything like this, Brook," she advised. "You won't have much time for baking and I'm not a bit ashamed to confide to you that there are just as fine pastries at Miller's. It's only that today seemed to call for a cake on my part."

Tom thought so, too. Definitely. And greatly admired Aunt Jane's handiwork and ordered a wedge put away for him. He made an impressive speech to Aunt Jane making clear that he would greatly miss her now that he appreciated her true worth.

She was genuinely touched by the speech but would not let them be anything but cheerful about her going, telling Brook, "I always enjoyed running a house when I was your age."

Now that the time drew near for taking over, Brook looked doubtful, in spite of her many and frequent self-assurances. Tom was decidedly downcast also. Aunt Jane looked thoughtful and said, "I, myself, have a problem to solve and I might as well tell you about it. It's all because of the housing shortage," she said. "I allowed some old friends to stay at my house while I've been here these few weeks. Frankly I don't like to turn them out and it occurred to me that if you'd care to have me stay on here, why they could go on staying at my house for the time being. I wouldn't be here on the old basis, naturally, but I'd be just as pleased to pay rent here as in my own place as long as *they* are taking over for me. They're so pleased to have it, too. I could keep an eye on things here, meanwhile."

Brook hoped her haste in replying was not too closely remarked by Tom in particular and offered to accept if Aunt Jane would stay as a guest, no housework allowed and no rent-paying of course. Just being on hand would be a great help. But here Aunt Jane showed an unsuspected stubborn streak. It would all have to be businesslike, she said otherwise she would be uncomfortable, and Tom offered a personal compromise on the basis of a once-weekly cake.

"I couldn't sit idly by, watching you and Brook take valuable time from schoolwork to do the little here that needs doing. This house almost runs itself, you know. Suppose I agree to pay my rent and then you pay me for overseeing matters here. I might just as well earn my keep. And I've no appointments elsewhere for all of this month or next, as it happens."

It was mathematically worked out, not by Tom's imaginative figures, but by Brook's more careful ones. The rent came to exactly as much as the work to be done. It was all easy to see through and everyone pretended not to and it greatly satisfied Aunt Jane. Brook could only admit to herself the endless relief she felt in the knowledge that they weren't to lose Aunt Jane, after all.

Brook had thought the winter days would be long and their house lonely and too quiet, but she was pleased to find time moving rapidly and visitors frequent. Sue came often and so did Philip's younger sisters. They were getting old enough to be considered people. Amy was twelve and Cynthia nine and they came to Brook with every imaginable nine- and twelve-year-old problem. More rarely, Philip came.

Dr. Davitt pointed out to the Devoted Followers, as Tommy called them, that Mars, in these begin-

ning days of March, was now retreating and losing brilliance.

"If any of you can get to a small telescope, observe Saturn with its wonderfully bright rings, not so red as Mars, of course. And Jupiter rises in the southeast at about 2 a.m. As you know, its constellation is Sagittarius."

These clear cold evenings, small groups of Inquirers could be found along the Maybury Road and even so far away as Frog Pond, seeking and finding Arcturus by making prolonged curves from the handle of the Big Dipper.

Many of these afternoons Brook walked home with Sue who could take conversations almost as far afield as Dr. Davitt and could with no seeming effort lift Brook's thoughts out of their troubling circle.

The Clay Club, besides, had invited entries for a Spring Show and Brook and Sue planned together, with Brook at last getting to work on an ambitious project involving Brush and Bella and Bodoni.

Best of all, Sam Falter's letters came three times weekly. They were brief letters and did not say enough to tell her how he was progressing, but it was cause for gratitude when week after week the writing at the bottom of the typewritten notes was even and legible. Late in March he wrote in a postscript,

"Paul Thatcher said—for the first time—he was *really* pleased with me today. I've begun to write a book. There are some ideas in my head for a series of articles. We'll talk about these when more have been done."

The news made her walk on air. Thatcher said *he was really pleased*. She showed the letter to Tom, although Tom was corresponding separately. They looked at each other solemnly, as if after a dearly-won victory.

The days went more swiftly now. March, too, was gone. Early in April there was a letter from Paul Thatcher. It came for both of them and, for a moment, each wanted the other to open it. Then Tommy, somewhat grimly, tore open the envelope. "Well, whatever it is, bad news or otherwise, here goes." With growing interest he read the short message to himself first.

"Brook, listen. Paul Thatcher wants us both to come to see him. During the Easter holiday. We're to say what day."

"No bad news?" Her heart was still thumping furiously at sight of the envelope marked with Paul Thatcher's name.

"On the contrary. Look," he pointed to the words, *I'm glad to say there's good progress to report.*

Philip, home for the Easter vacation, came by to see Tommy and Tommy asked him if he wanted to go with them to see Thatcher.

"It's a family consultation, I think," Philip said. "Paul Thatcher would have asked me in if he wanted me. But I'd like to meet you both afterward, if you like. We can have supper together, anyway. My treat. I've been so busy I haven't had a chance to spend a nickel of my Christmas money."

Paul Thatcher lived in a limestone town house off Lexington Avenue in the East 70's in New York, a handsome foursquare house in a quiet tree-planted block. Brook expected a uniformed nurse to meet them as in Dr. Burchall's office but instead Paul Thatcher himself came to the door when they rang.

He led them into a small sitting room opening off a garden in the back where already a haze of green lay on shrubs and trees. Door and windows were wide open and the soft air filled the room.

Paul Thatcher, tall and long-limbed and stoop-shouldered, was about their father's age, she judged, and had a non-professional and friendly manner with them. Brook was grateful, too, that he was alone. For a moment she had thought they were to meet their father here, after his long absence.

Tom and Brook sat on a sofa that faced the garden

and Mr. Thatcher—he at once told them he was not a doctor—sat on the edge of a table and talked with them.

“I’ve already met both of you, I feel, through Sam Falter’s first-rate description,” he said. “He’s been so explicit I think I’d have recognized you anywhere. I’m going to be explicit too. I think you’re both intelligent enough to help me. Because from now on it’s up to Sam Falter, of course—just as it has been all along, but also it’s up to the rest of us, friends and family.

“In a few months, perhaps two, he’ll be back home with you. He’s at work writing on the subject nearest him at the moment. Incidentally, I’d better tell you—it may give you comfort—I’d been given up as hopeless by my own family. Yes,” he said, meeting Tommy’s incredulous stare, “exactly for the reason you think. Drinking.”

Brook looked about her and at Paul Thatcher in frank disbelief. “You, Mr. Thatcher?” The news of her father’s near-success seemed almost less impressive now, than the bit of news he had just given them.

“I turned to helping others,” he said, “because my own experience seemed so needless and terrible. Now,” he went on, “I do want you to know one thing. There may be a relapse. Perhaps more than

one." He looked seriously from one to the other.

"The first six months are discouraging for many reasons. Overconfidence is one. Everything then seems to be undone. I've asked Sam Falter to stay away from home for these first six months. It's generally the best way. So far as I know there hasn't been a relapse. And it may not occur, but if it does, you must not be alarmed. I don't think your father will ever go back. Another thing, there can never again be an occasional drink for Sam Falter. It just doesn't work that way." Paul Thatcher was very definite.

The telephone rang and he lifted the receiver. "Yes, I see. Are you—are you able to get here? . . . All right, I'll be here, waiting." He put down the receiver, but he still held his hand on the phone and was silent and thoughtful for a while.

Tom stood up. "We're glad you let us come."

"There are a great many people in need of help," he said. "More than we know of." He began to walk them slowly toward the door. "As for the Falter family," he said, "there's this I'd like to say to you, Tom, and to you, Brook. Both of you must help Sam Falter carry on his work. I know I can count on you to offer no obstacles. You are his responsibilities, both of you. He felt it very keenly, Brook, when you

left to go to your aunt's. Make him believe you appreciate the new way of life. Another thing, if you want me, I'm always here for you to see. Perhaps it's early to say so, but I think Sam Falter will be one of my proudest successes."

Brook remembered the telephone conversation. Someone only able to arrive would want to see Paul Thatcher alone, surely.

The outside bell rang. Paul Thatcher went ahead to open the door. Brook, from the half of the telephone conversation she had heard, had visualized a man talking to Thatcher, but before them was a young woman. She had fine features and wide eyes and dark hair combed simply back. She was quite as tall as Tom and she looked at all three as though she had not seen them. Brook could not forget the expression in her eyes. She had never before seen such blind despair. And now again the air was heavy with acridness.

They left hurriedly. At least, Brook comforted herself, she is in good hands. She felt better, thinking that Paul Thatcher would talk to her, slowly and understandingly, showing her the way back out of the maze, a way he had himself found.

Brook and Tom walked across the park to meet Philip. There was newness in the mild spring air.

"I wish whatever it is Dad's writing could be in the *Press*. It would be the sort of thing to wake up the reading membership," Tom said.

"Even if Mr. Willey would run it, which is most improbable, I think what he's writing ought to be where it could reach millions of people, if Paul Thatcher is right. All the millions that need it."

"It's just the beginning, Brook. Dad could be busy writing his articles from morning to night to keep up with the demand I foresee."

There were many dancing thoughts in her mind. As for herself, the work was there, waiting to be done when she'd learned everything there was to know about it.

From a long distance away, when they reached the south end of the Park, she saw Philip, taking long strides toward them. He was searching their faces as he approached, Brook saw, and saw too that he was pleased. Philip was thinner and had lost the awkwardness of last year. He seemed well-knit now and was quite as tall as Tom.

They found a bench half in shade near the swans' lake and while their thoughts were all with Thatcher and the interview Brook and Tom had come from, they watched the moving white birds upon the water.

Through all the winter months she had avoided

the subject of her father in her infrequent talks with Philip. Now, that the goal was in sight she could almost speak freely to him.

"How did you make Dad go to see Paul Thatcher?" she asked.

"I didn't," Philip said. "I happened, in the course of our conversation, to mention him. I'd been reading books on the subject," he said. "It was part of my preparatory work. I ran across a book about alcohol and its effects. I thought I'd like to read more about it and I found another book on the subject, a novel this time, and a third book, and so on. I studied all of them and couldn't see how it would hurt to talk to Sam Falter. I thought they would interest him, if he wanted to be interested. I knew him well, I believed. I've always liked him, and—well, I thought I'd found the answer."

She imagined the scene. Perhaps it had been even worse than that evening just before she'd met Philip. Yes, for he'd been at the Club for several days by the time Philip had come. She did not look at Philip as he talked.

"I hoped you wouldn't mind, Brook. I'd already talked to Tom—and then, I went to Dr. Davitt. You know it was she who introduced me to the people at New Haven."

Dr. Davitt, too? Everyone had known except herself. It had been unkind to keep her in ignorance.

Philip sensed a reproach. "Dr. Davitt knows Paul Thatcher and his work and the percentage of success he's had. She told me what to do and that's all I did. She thought I ought to be the one because—well, I think Sam Falter likes me and, besides, she thought a stranger carries more weight than a member of the family. Suppose it had failed, Brook? Suppose he'd not have consented to see Thatcher? I'd have involved you for nothing."

But she could not help thinking she had been left out of it. Perhaps one day she would not mind it, but at the moment it was a glancing blow. In the silence Tom looked at her with that same new solicitude she had noticed.

"Brook feels as Mother always did," Tom said to Philip. "She wants to cover up the ugly places. It's our affair and a disgrace and let's not show it to the world, even if there's a solution outside. Not that you can help it, Brook, it's just the way you are. We didn't tell Philip, you know. Philip knew."

She was suddenly embarrassed. Instead of thanking Philip, she had made her misgivings obvious to him. "Tom's right. I don't feel at all that way now,

Philip, now that Tom's explained me to myself. I just keep hoping Thatcher is right."

"Dr. Davitt believes he's right and she doesn't take kindly to false optimism," Philip said.

Being told about Dr. Davitt's confidence helped and Philip's own belief in success helped. They went to a movie afterward and there were only brief, disturbing moments when Brook thought of Paul Thatcher's warning, *There may be a relapse*. But now, no matter how much she tried to persuade herself that they could not depend on success, the hope had become fixed as a brilliant, unfailing star.

THE spring term was far from the lightly-worn crown of glory all of the college seniors expected it to be. Tom was working his hardest. Professor Evers was at last exacting his toll, and mathematics had always been something of a survival struggle for Tom. Yet he still gave the *Press* every hour of promised time.

There were now warm spring afternoons in which Frog Pond once more became a misty smoky-green hollow. Brook came here after school and after Clay Club sessions, remembering the winter days as if they had been a long cold dream, aware now only of waiting and hoping.

Today Tom came along after leaving the *Press*. The sun still hung in the sky after they had walked up Maybury Hill and made their way to Frog Pond.

All the crowding fears came up when she was

tired and today Brook was tired. *Sam Falter, I think, will be one of my proudest successes.* But even Paul Thatcher could be wrong. Suppose, too, she could not meet the requirements of one of the nearby colleges. She had long ago decided she would not leave home to go to school elsewhere. When she had taken the spring exams for Queens College she thought that she might fail had almost prevented her from concentrating on the questions. Tom was talking to her and she turned to listen.

"There's this summer ahead of me. I've always wanted to go over the length and breadth of the U.S.A. Hitch my way across-country and get to know what things are like elsewhere. Of course I'd work my way. If I ever expect to be a good newspaperman this point of view is bound to be—well, a bit limited, if not actually distorted. South Ebury isn't enough perspective. Or too much."

She had put away the thought of Tom's leaving and it was here to add to the troubling questions she'd been asking herself.

She did not look at him, looking instead at the deepening blue of the sky that only in the west was beginning to show sunset color, fixing it in her mind as if she recognized it as an important moment and so would want to retain the look of it in her mind.

One phase of their family life had ended with her mother's death. She wondered if another phase was ending and the break-up beginning. If her father failed and Tom went off, perhaps he would not return. At any rate he would return having established that he could be on his own. "Boys live their own lives," Aunt Marian had said.

"Would you have gone away, Tommy, if Mother were still alive. If all the rest of this hadn't come about?"

"I don't know. Unless Mother had objected I think I would. Anyone that's planning to work on a newspaper has to do more than hole in, or anyone that wants to write a book or *do* anything."

"I'll worry about you all the same."

"Why?" He was greatly surprised.

"Oh, falling in with bad companions—rogues and thieves."

"I hope I do. Good people make poor copy—dull, anyway." He looked down at his hands that were grimy and he looked up at her and said, "I forgot to wash."

"Obviously." But she was touched by the way he looked at her, exactly as when he used to apologize for the same oversight to their mother when he was small.

"I'll have to get going," he said, "now that things are more settled—Dad coming back and you deciding for home and college instead of Aunt Marian. Everything's set," he said, "except me."

"You, Tom? You have more plans than any of us with the *Press* waiting anxiously for you to come back."

"Mr. Willey's looking for a buyer for the *Press*."

"Really?" It was a jolt. With the *Press* changing hands there'd be little reason for Tom's coming back to South Ebury. Again the troubled round of thinking. Tom alone along the way, hitchhiking, making new friends. What about their home? She sat up tall.

"Really," he repeated.

"I'd say it was good news. Whoever buys it will be glad to have you on hand, Tom. You know you're first-rate at your job. Dad's said a hundred times you're a born newspaperman and so does Mr. Willey think so."

Tommy nodded and smiled at her. "Mr. Willey knows it and Dad knows it. I know it, too, but suppose the new owner has two sons and a son-in-law and a managing editor already picked. Where do I come in?"

"He may have big ideas for expanding and need everyone around, old hands and new."

"I suppose so. I don't know why I'm gloomy about it. The chances are as good as not."

In the May night she lay awake, the windows wide open and the night earth-damp smell coming to her out of the back garden. She had talked over the phone to her father during the evening. It was definite about coming home the first of June. Paul Thatcher agreed. Both commencements, Tom's at Queens and her own at South Ebury High would be the third week of June. That meant their father would have been home for a while and the routine established by then. Friends and neighbors would have seen him, become accustomed to a new Sam Falter.

She thought now of Aunt Jane's day as she had gathered its progress from events about the house, and in the darkness smiled. Aunt Jane had been busy from early morning on, making elaborate preparations, for Sam Falter had written her separately the indications were for coming home soon. Every room had been turned out and put back. At last there had arisen a problem to confront Jane Sutherland that she was unable to cope with alone.

For long moments at a time she had been looking into one room and another, a worried frown on her serene forehead. At last she took Brook into her confidence. Should Sam Falter's study be changed to the south room as he was going to work in it all day? And the bedroom be made out of the north room? What did Brook think? Yes, it was a good idea, Brook thought, and after consultation with Tom, it was decided that these rooms be turned about. Then when it had been rearranged, Brook had the arresting thought that it would disturb the picture of the home he was working so hard to keep intact. It was all moved back to the original arrangement.

She was still restlessly wakeful. Something would be proved, she felt, when she saw him after so long. Tom was unshakably certain of the outcome, but alone and in the darkness, she had misgivings. Yet Thatcher's last letter gave her the right to be confident.

She stretched her hand into the air and counted off problems. There was one for every finger: Aunt Jane who had been managing so beautifully for them. For all of it she had not been paid a penny since January.

There was Dad. Her secret wish was that he could work elsewhere, as he himself wanted to, rather than

at the *Herald-Telegraph* where they knew him too well.

There was Tommy, leaving them to go on his own journey of discovery, dubious about the new policy at the *Press*.

There was her own college problem that raised the question of money, once more. She knew so painfully little about money. There'd been no talk about money at home. Their mother had never told them the details of their income. They were not yet old enough, she told them, for this or that piece of information. Shielding them, protecting them, exactly as she shielded them from seeing their father at certain times.

There had been a sharply defined difference between her world and theirs. One ended and the other began. Yet they were aware of that difference and in their minds or rather in Brook's mind—perhaps Tommy did not feel the same way about it—in Brook's mind the unknown was a fear. Brook had eagerly accepted her mother's protection.

*Unwilling to fight*, Dr. Burchall had said. Dr. Burchall didn't know. He could never know. She had put herself in the very forefront of the fight to shield and protect and take the blows.

Last of all there was Philip about whom she had

put off thinking. Philip was falling into the habit of writing her weekly. She remembered one talk they'd had, an inconsequential talk when he had told her he had seen Paul Thatcher and she was listening to him and while listening she had wanted to say, "But Philip, I'm not good enough for you. It's the Falter part of me that isn't." She put it out of her head because it hurt her to think about it. I've been too good a biology student, she told herself, not to know all it means. Dr. Davitt had taught them to think without subtlety. But she could not put it out of her mind much as she tried to, and the words formed themselves. *I know the Falter part of me isn't good enough for you, but I do love you, Philip.* You could only think these things in darkness and at night and alone.

All her thoughts ended nowhere and there was at least this to cling to, that Sam Falter was still one of Paul Thatcher's proudest successes. And he was coming home. It was enough to overshadow the rest.

She fell into a light sleep dreaming at once that she sat by the side of Frog Pond, telling herself it would be easy now she was here to find the answers. And at once—awakening her to full consciousness—there was the answer.

She had forgotten it entirely up to this moment.

Aunt Marian had said it would be on her birthday and it would be her birthday in fifteen days. Tom's was later in October, but it didn't matter as long as hers came right away. She flew out of bed and slid into her bathrobe and knocked at Tom's door.

There was a sleepy response. "What's up?"

"Can I come in, Tom? I've thought of something stupendous."

"Is it too stupendous to wait for the morning?" He was half-awake and came to the door in the dark.

"Oh, much," she said, clicking on the light beside his bed.

"This room's chilly. Where's my bathrobe?"

Brook handed him his bathrobe.

"Haven't you been asleep?" he asked her. "You look wide-awake."

"Listen, Tom, I haven't been able to sleep. Now, concentrate. When I visited Aunt Marian she said I was to have some money on my birthday. And you too. For me at eighteen and you at twenty-one."

"Brook, is it possible you are waking me up to tell me something I've known ever since I can remember? Uncle Henry has been giving me business advice from the time I was ten, all based on this money. Sometimes I think it's a million dollars. I've heard it's considerably less. Now please say good-night to me."

"Do you know how much?"

"Yes. We each get twenty-five hundred dollars. We could talk all of this over in the morning."

"Do you think we can buy the *Press*?"

He looked at her a full minute and she thought, he is either going to throw me out or fall asleep thinking it over. Or else, he feels the way I do about it. Bursting with it.

"Brook—" He was as wide-awake as she. Then all the sudden eagerness lighting up his face went out of it. "We'd never have enough." But he could not help the enthusiasm coming back into his voice. "Imagine having the policy to make—imagine actually owning a paper. Oh, what did you have to tell me about it for?"

"Because I almost have my hands on my money."

There was a tentative knock at the door. "Is everything all right, Brook? I heard you calling Tom."

"Oh, yes, please come in, Aunt Jane."

She was wrapped in a too-large robe and looked as fresh and composed as if she'd had a full night's sleep.

Brook said, "I've thought of something so remarkable we can't sleep any more. Shall we tell you, too, so you won't, either?"

"All right, I don't mind."

After they told her, she thought about it, then said, "Do you think your father would approve?"

Tom looked as if he weren't sure. "I hope so."

"Well," she said at last, "there's no harm asking Mr. Willey what the price is, and I think I would tell your Uncle Henry about the whole thing, too."

She had not laughed at them nor thought the plan impractical. Instead she had made an intelligent beginning plan.

Brook, back in bed, was sleepless. The bits of puzzle moved about until they had found their proper places. *Maybe I'll take a job on a paper that isn't quite so familiar with my personal life in the past . . . I wish I could help Tom somehow . . .* The plans were moving ahead in Brook's imagination.

She had not communicated with Uncle Henry nor talked with him since the day she had left his home. Aunt Marian had telephoned and talked with Aunt Jane briefly. Aunt Jane had been correspondingly brief and had said that Brook arrived home safely. But Aunt Marian had not asked to speak to Brook. Brook had been grateful for that.

She waited for days, it seemed to her, after she had written to Uncle Henry. At the last minute she

had left out mentioning the *Press*, having called up a vision of Uncle Henry striding into the *Press* office and forbidding any such transaction as she mentioned. Then his letter arrived.

My dear Brook,

Under no circumstances must you consider a business venture at your age. I will be glad to discuss with you any plan you have in mind, but you must not invest your money. Your experience is not able to guide you. Naturally, I will not be able to withhold either your twenty-five hundred dollars or your brother's, as your mother unwisely made no such provision for the use of my judgment in this matter, but I cannot see how you can allow yourself to be influenced, especially as you must know there is the very good possibility that your money will be squandered in no time at all.

Sincerely, your uncle,

Henry Stratton

Two things struck her. The first was that Tom had been right. At first she had thought he was being

over-optimistic about the sum. It was twenty-five hundred dollars and it seemed to her an incredibly large amount. She felt sure there would be quite a bit left over, after buying the *Press*. The second thing she noticed was that Uncle Henry could not withhold her money. That was the best news. Of course he thought her father had asked for it. That was the squandering part.

Mr. Willey received them in his office, the ante-room of the *Press* where Brook had so often waited for Tom to get through a piece of copy on Wednesday afternoons. He had closed off the door to the press-room, but as the press wasn't running this morning, it was an unusual thing to be sitting here without its familiar thump going on as accompaniment to Brook's thoughts.

Brook sat in the golden-oak chair and Tommy stood leaning against the bulletin board and Mr. Willey had not begun to think of them as other than Sue's friends who had casually dropped in.

It was Brook who came to the point. "We heard you were thinking of selling the *Press*, Mr. Willey. We'd like to ask the price."

He looked from one to the other and Brook fully expected him to turn to Tom and say, "Impractical,

Tom." Instead he nodded. "Why, yes, I've been contemplating it but—" he stopped as an idea occurred to him, and said to Brook, "Mr. Falter interested?"

There had always been a strained relationship between Mr. Willey and her father. It had begun a long time ago when Sue had been much younger and had overheard Brook's father say in an unguarded moment that he considered Wilbur Willey, a kind of fossil, or perhaps an example of *homo pithecanthropus*, exercising his dim cunning in an evolutionary effort to graduate to *homo sapiens*. This was delivered at home by Sue in somewhat garbled fashion, and although the garbled remarks did not begin to make sense to Mr. Willey he had gathered the gist of them and had avoided direct contact with Sam Falter. There had also been the fact that Sam Falter's reputation for good reporting and his job on a metropolitan daily constituted a classification above and beyond the one in which Wilbur Willey found himself as publisher of the South Ebury Press.

"No," Tom said, "*we* are."

"Well," Mr. Willey said, "as a matter of fact, I've an offer from the Medbury Gazette. They're willing to give me ten thousand."

There was an air of finality about Mr. Willey's

statement that left no room for discussion. Ten thousand? All Brook's hopes went crashing.

"Oh, well," Tom said, when they had left and walked a short way. "There's always the *Medbury Gazette* for us to buy up later on. That will include the *South Ebury Press*."

She smiled ruefully and saw that Tom wasn't as downcast as she was. "Oh, well," she said, "or the *Herald-Telegraph*."

"Exactly," said Tom.

They met Jane Sutherland walking toward them as they approached Winterside Drive. She knew where they had been and could read the result plainly in their eyes.

"Tell Aunt Jane the grim details," Tom said and hurried back to finish end-term work he had interrupted for the call on Mr. Willey.

"Hardly any details, Aunt Jane. Mr. Willey refuses," Brook said. "Tom's pretending not to mind."

Aunt Jane seemed to weigh the situation carefully. Then with the stubborn look Brook had seen on rare occasions, she said, "Let's go back and see him together, Brook."

"Together?"

"Yes, you and I. I don't believe he takes Tom

seriously. He's known him since he was too little to be taken seriously. Will you come with me?"

"Why, of course—but there's really no use. It's a matter of money."

"Well, then, let's hurry before he leaves."

Aunt Jane had a look on her face that seemed to indicate she had a prepared set of remarks for Mr. Willey.

Mr. Willey looked up in surprise.

"How are you, Mr. Willey?" Aunt Jane inquired. "Sue said the other evening you'd hurt your arm when the pressroom window jammed."

"Much better, thank you, much better." Mr. Willey looked with suspicion upon Aunt Jane. He was not altogether certain whether he could accept her wholeheartedly into his confidence and friendship since Jane Sutherland was an out-and-out newcomer to South Ebury where the Willeys had resided since 1754 as he often stated. He solved the problem of Aunt Jane's status, however, by addressing her as *Madam*.

"I hear," said Aunt Jane, "that the *Medbury Gazette* is taking over the *Press*."

"Oh, no. I've just had an offer. I don't mean I'm ready to accept it."

"Why not, Mr. Willey?"

Obviously a struggle was taking place before Brook's eyes and Jane Sutherland had the upper hand.

"I believe I can get more for it. By the way, Madam, are you, too, interested in buying the *Press*?"

"Frankly, it's an idea of Brook's. She feels that Tom one day will want to settle in South Ebury. She thinks it would have pleased her mother to have him settle here."

Mr. Willey sensed the intended rebuke and redeemed himself to the best of his ability. "I'd like to see that happen myself."

"Well, I don't see why you can't do something about it."

"I'll accept any offer over the *Gazette's*."

"Well then," she said, giving Brook only the briefest of glances, "we offer two hundred and fifty dollars over the *Gazette's* offer."

Mr. Willey stood up and came toward them. He held out his hand to Jane Sutherland and turned to Brook. "I can't think of anyone I'd rather see have the *Press* than Tom Falter."

"We'll ask you," Jane Sutherland said, "to keep this between us. Not a word to anyone. Especially Tom."

SAM FALTER was home. He was the same and not the same. Subdued, yet calm and at ease. Pale and thinner, yet stronger-looking, too. The changes were all to the good, Brook saw. He did not laugh so often nor so heartily. Perhaps that would come later. Perhaps that other laughter had been not altogether genuine and falsely stimulated. But nothing was so important as being together again with their father well. They had Paul Thatcher's word for that but she knew it was so when she first looked at him, as she had known she would. Deep inside her a sense of security and peace quieted and replaced the long fear.

From the moment he heard of it, their father approved of Tom's trip. Just before Tom left, Sam Falter wrote down a list of newspaper people for

him to see along the way. They had always been good friends, Tom and his father, but now the bond was made firm. They took long walks together and the last evening Tom was at home they played chess. Long after Brook was in bed, she heard their voices coming up from the game room. She fell contentedly asleep.

Sam Falter was preparing to return to the *Herald-Telegraph*. They had written him and he had replied and accepted, allowing himself all of July to finish his book.

"Have you been managing all right? Have you had enough money?" he asked Brook.

"With Aunt Jane's help," Brook said, "very well."

"We'll make it up to her soon," he said, concerned. "I'll be back on the paper the first of August. At any rate I'm glad about what I did with the money Henry has salted away for you two. I didn't want to keep it. I felt if I'd be inclined to run through it, I'd leave you two starving. When your Grandmother Falter died I gave your mother the money she left me. 'Put it away,' I told her, 'where it will be hard for me to get at. Uncle Henry is probably the last person I'd ever approach.' So Uncle Henry was elected treasurer. But I'm glad it's yours now. What are you going to do with it?"

Aunt Jane had come into the room and he had gone on talking but Brook looked uncomfortably up at her. She and Jane Sutherland, conspiring together, had thought of ways to make the *Press* purchase known to him, but none they could think of had so far satisfied either of them. It had to be done gently at the most auspicious moment. And at this moment, Brook was turning over in her mind what he had just told her.

In the new light, it wasn't Uncle Henry's money at all, as everyone had assumed it to be. It was their father's, every cent of it. He had put it into Uncle Henry's hands for safekeeping, or rather their mother had. But it had been his. That was the point. It *was* his.

She remembered his question. "Well, Dad, I must take the blame if there's going to be any. We've bought the *Press*, the South Ebury *Press*."

He looked at Brook and then at Jane Sutherland and his face became set and impassive and difficult to understand. She could not imagine what he was thinking. There was a long pause, then he cleared his throat.

Everything depended on what he would say. On what he would say in the next two minutes. If he were furious with her, then even the six months of

Paul Thatcher's patient, magnificent work—and his own—might be lost. She remembered suddenly and uncomfortably the disparaging remarks he had made of Wilbur Willey and his paper. She had never foreseen that she would now be badly frightened.

"I guess," he said slowly, "I guess that's about what I'd have done with the money myself."

"You're not angry?" Brook was almost in tears. "Really not?"

He shook his head emphatically. Then looked in amazement at her, as a thought struck him. "Wait a minute, Brook. You don't mean to tell me that rare example of extinct publisher sold out for five thousand dollars!"

Jane Sutherland, Brook saw, was pleased with the way things were going. She nodded to Brook. "Jane Sutherland's the other partner," Brook said.

"What a partnership," he said. "What an unbeatable combination."

"Only thing is," Brook said, all her confidence welling back richly and warmly, "we're looking for a first-rate Managing Editor and Editor-in-Chief rolled into one." She was looking at her father and it was the scene she had rehearsed but in the rehearsal there had only been acceptance. She leaned

toward him, "Dad—" she said, but he interrupted her.

"Seek no longer," Sam Falter said. He had the look she had seen before, many times over, beginning perhaps with the time when she first awoke to consciousness. She remembered it especially from the time when they were little and he had worried over them in illness but tried to put on a brave show and smiled cheerfully at them, while his eyes searched theirs, unfathomably serious.

She hoped she could prove to him he would have no cause for alarm. She hoped Tom would return and would follow through. She hoped a thousand bright shining hopes in that instant.

"I apply for the job and hope to be hired. I stand on my record as a journalist. I can furnish excellent references."

The negotiations for the paper were brief and formal and required many signatures. Sam Falter read them carefully and with absorbed single-mindedness. He made suggestions and brought a lawyer from the city to look it all over.

At the very start of proceedings, Sam Falter said, "Jane is right. Tom isn't to know. He isn't to cut his trip short by a day. Let him look around and see

the kind of things he can draw from and come back fresh and enthusiastic. To the *Press*, if he wants to, or anywhere else." Sam Falter wrote into the agreement the option that would allow Tom to buy into the *Press* when he returned, and for Tom's sake title-taking was deferred to October first.

It could not possibly remain as exciting as it had seemed that early spring day. Yet it did. Their interest would not flag. The *Press*, appearing as usual with all its news and columns of "twaddle," was looked at critically and studied. Until they knew Tom's plans, everything must wait. Sam Falter, in the meantime, was making copious notes. He had long lists of suggestions and held many preliminary meetings with the staff, meaning Jane Sutherland and Philip who was doubling for Tom. Once Paul Thatcher innocently came out for a brief, friendly visit and became accidentally and heavily involved in a *Press* conference.

At the Willey household all the aunts and Sue and Grandma were packing for the exodus west. Mr. Willey had decided to pull up his historic roots from South Ebury and settle beside another set of Willeys in California. It was decided that the South Ebury Willeys would live with the California Willeys while

a ranch house would go up to hold the easterners. They had soon found a buyer for the South Ebury house.

The new owners of the Willey house seemed already to have moved in. Every time Brook stopped by for Sue, there they were, husband, wife, and ten-year-old daughter, measuring and pacing out distances and, in air, arranging their furniture, seemingly oblivious to the whole troupe of Willeys who stood by and were silent and the least bit hostile.

Dr. Davitt was giving a summer session in Sociology I and II during July and August. It was on the college level and planned as an intensive make-up course for college people, but Brook, hearing about it, asked if she might sit in. It was to cover in all-day sessions what ordinarily would cover a full year's work.

Dr. Davitt was choosing the college people carefully, interviewing them first. When Brook came to see her, they sat together in Dr. Davitt's comfortable airy office, talking of things far removed from this summer's course.

"What news from Tom?"

"He's reached Chicago and has a short job on the *Tribune*. Just a few days' work filling in for one of the men on vacation, but he's glad to have it and

writes it keeps him in touch with newspapers, anyway."

"He loves his work," Dr. Davitt commented. "This trip is a good thing. We had a long talk, Brook, before he went off," Dr. Davitt added. "He brought up the subject of heredity. We talked about it in relation to alcohol."

Again she had the feeling of having her privacy invaded as she had the day when Philip told her he had asked Dr. Davitt's help with her father and again had to remember Tom's explaining her to herself.

Dr. Davitt went on, "I told Tom he'd be offered drinks from now on. The wise thing to do, I said, was to let them stand or say *No, thanks*, if they'd not yet been poured. And then I changed my mind. I began to think it's not a good idea to forbid anything to an adult. And so I said, 'Tom, do you think that's good advice?' He took a deep breath and dived in. 'No, I don't want to be afraid of myself. I hope I'll be able to say *No anywhere, anytime.*' "

Brook was troubled nevertheless. It might be so subtle he wouldn't know. It had been a very long process with her father, perhaps all through the early years of his marriage he had felt, *I'll be able to say No anywhere, anytime.* Even Dr. Davitt

couldn't know. Only someone who'd grown up with it could know. It had led her father on beyond the point of needing a drink to the point of not being able to do without a drink.

Dr. Davitt studied Brook. Then she said quietly, "I don't think you need worry. I think I'd not have said what I did to someone I wasn't altogether sure of. Why do you want to take my course, Brook? It will only be an advantage if you major in Sociology."

"I do want to major in Sociology. I suppose I might say," Brook said slowly, "I'd found my career." It would have to be told to her now and even if she disapproved and did not allow her to take the course, her mind was made up. "I think your course will take me in the right direction."

"What is the direction, Brook?"

"I'd like to work with children, I think. I'd like to find out early—what it is that is going so terribly wrong that it might lead them eventually to alcohol. I'd like to try to give them something to fall back on—some other thing—something to think about and do instead. Dr. Davitt, even if the heredity people are right, there may be a way out of it, don't you think? A way to handle people who Tom says 'have it arranged for them in advance?' "

"I'll be happy to have you in my class this summer," Dr. Davitt said. "Perhaps we can continue to work together later. I know people in the education field who can be valuable to you, Brook. And—" she stood up and spoke very earnestly, "the heredity people, as you call them, have been proved wrong about many diseases. Anyway," she said bluntly, "I don't hold with them on the subject of alcohol."

It was a good thing to hear—a sustaining and comforting thing, for if the heredity people were wrong about it, then Tommy didn't have it arranged for him at all, and also because then—then, perhaps she was, after all, good enough for Philip.

But for the frequent sense of loss coming upon her at odd, unexpected moments, it would have been the same. But for the tender haunting memory, the long summer days were no different than the days of a summer ago.

Coming home from Dr. Davitt's session this afternoon, Brook noticed the neglected garden and the untended ground on either side of the walk. What was it they had planned? She would find out, she thought, and remembered with a new shock that she could not find out. Zinnias, yes, the miniature ones for the front, giants for the back, or was it the other

way round? It had been a long time ago that they had planned it.

Even the wide back window in her room was open today and the whole house was full of summer. After all the work at school, an enormous inertia overcame Brook. In her desk she looked for garden catalogues and selected the one that had the largest zinnias on the cover. She would order the giant packet. Of course it was too late but perhaps a few blooms would come up, anyway. Suddenly tired, she let her hand relax upon the arm of her chair, as she heard Aunt Jane's firm quick steps.

"Brook?" Aunt Jane announced herself from the top of the stairs.

"Yes, Aunt Jane, come in."

"I would like to know if I ought to dip this set of curtains for your room. The color has faded out entirely and it used to be such a pretty yellow."

"I can easily do them myself, one of these days."

"Oh, it doesn't mean a thing. And with all the summer work you're doing, you've quite enough on your mind." She stood still in the doorway and Brook, seeing her standing there noticed she was looking very pretty today, having arranged her hair differently, for one thing.

"I like the way you've done your hair, Aunt Jane."

"Do you?" She came into the room. "Perhaps I could do a bit of sewing in here, if you don't mind, as I used to."

"I'd like that very much. Did I ever tell you I did my best work with you in the room? I wasn't working at all, just now. I was ordering seeds for the garden."

Jane Sutherland said quietly, "I've been thinking of it, too, but somehow I could not bring myself to plant your mother's garden. I thought perhaps you would plant it yourself, Brook, when you were ready, rather than have it tended by a stranger. A garden is so personal."

"I've never thought *you* a stranger, Aunt Jane."

"Haven't you, Brook?"

"Of course not."

"Well, I'm very glad to hear you say so."

Brook wondered at what seemed to be subtlety in Aunt Jane who was always so direct and looked at one squarely with her clear, bright blue eyes. Aunt Jane now was looking away from her and had stopped her work.

"Brook, I must say I'd begun to feel very attached here. Each one of you had some need for me, or so I felt. Then, suddenly, I remembered I'd come for only a little while, for just long enough to let the

household begin its usual routine once more. It's been very easy and pleasant to live here with you. I *am* so fond of you all."

"Are you leaving us, Aunt Jane? You're not, are you? Don't forget that you are a partner in the *Press*." Brook tried to summon a smile, but the threat seemed imminent and very great.

"Well, whenever someone would write or telephone to say there was illness and I was needed, I'd recommend Miss Revere and then feel ashamed of myself for staying long after I was needed."

"But you were needed every minute of the time, Aunt Jane," Brook said.

Jane Sutherland shook her head. "You're so obviously capable, Brook. Yesterday I had a letter from a dear lady I've known for twenty years and taken care of on many occasions."

"Is she ill?"

"No, but it did remind me that I'd better be letting you take over. I know you've wanted to these many months. It was only a matter of someone helping you with the housework. I know you could do the rest beautifully. I thought of all these things, and then yesterday evening when you were at Sue's, I told all of it to your father."

The threat loomed even larger. "And of course

he would not let you go," Brook hopefully put forth.

Jane Sutherland stood up and came to Brook and looked out of the wide window past Brook and said, "I know it is difficult to believe, but your father asked me to marry him."

It was exactly as Aunt Marian had predicted and not at all as Aunt Marian had predicted. Aunt Marian had been altogether wrong. Aunt Marian was, in fact, not a welcome thought.

Brook waited but Jane Sutherland was looking at her now. "What ought I to say, Brook?"

"Well, *didn't* you say anything?" Brook asked her in astonishment.

"Only that I'd think about it. And talk to you."

"I think you ought to say Yes." It was right. She knew it was right. She felt it with all her heart. "That is, if you want to," Brook added.

"I do. I'd gladly say Yes if you and Tom are in favor of it."

"I think you know how Tom feels about you, Aunt Jane."

She listened to Brook attentively, her head a little to one side. Then said, "And there is another thing. I thought and thought of it ever since last night." She was troubled. "You see, Brook, I have been feeling that at last your father has assumed his full

responsibility toward both of you. By himself. Do you think I would disturb that?"

Brook shook her head. "I don't think so. Mother always forgave him—always assumed the responsibility herself. Paul Thatcher says he is cured of giving up that responsibility. He thought that even if there were a relapse it would be only an isolated thing." She went to Aunt Jane and put her hand on Aunt Jane's arm in an urgent impulsive gesture. "I think you ought to say Yes, Aunt Jane."

Jane Sutherland's eyes were shining as she smiled and held Brook's hand. "All night I hoped you'd say that. All night I hoped you'd say, 'Please say Yes, Jane.' "

"Please say Yes, Jane."

She still held Brook's hand, but the other arm went round Brook's shoulders and Aunt Jane held her close to her and kissed Brook's cheek and Brook affectionately returned Jane's kiss.

Philip Cantrell came to the wedding of Jane Sutherland and Sam Falter at the City Clerk's office in New York. Also present was Paul Thatcher. And besides Brook, there was only a tall young man who came late and seemed to be as excited and pleased as if he were himself being happily married.

The tall young man came toward her, immediately afterward, and said, "Miss Falter, I'm Bill Cullen," and shook Brook's hand for what seemed a very long time. "Ever since I talked to you, Miss Falter, I have been trying to visualize you. I must say—"

Philip, unaccountably brisk and businesslike, considering the circumstances, cut in to say that Paul Thatcher was expecting them all to be his guests at lunch at home. Although he wasn't sure about Mr.—was it—Cullen?

"Yes, Bill Cullen," young Mr. Cullen said anxiously.

"I'll ask Mr. Thatcher, if you like," Philip offered, without making a visible move to do so.

"Don't bother. I just dropped in for a moment. My lunch hour. I'm on the *Herald*. Editorial. Assistant to Mr. Falter. That is, I was when Mr. Falter was on the *Herald*."

Philip said, "Well, it was nice to meet you."

Brook felt she would have liked to hear what Bill Cullen was about to say.

MR. WILLEY, it developed after a while, was considerably flattered to have as his successor, Sam Falter, formerly of the *Herald-Telegraph*. Now, each afternoon, promptly at one, Sam Falter walked to the *Press* office and began his acquaintance with the duties he would take over—and add to—when Wilbur Willey headed westward.

Mr. Willey gladly relinquished his responsibilities to Sam Falter and, following a lifelong desire, spent long afternoons at Medbury Creek perfecting a neglected fly-casting technique.

Brook had now made the habit of coming by for her father daily, after Dr. Davitt's class. On this last day of July the anteroom was at its most oppressive but her father had come upon a file of the first year of publication of the South Ebury *Press* and had at last asked Brook to leave without him.

"It's much too hot for you to wait. If you will go along, Brook, I'll be at home within an hour."

She began to walk homeward, her steps lagging, and turned the corner of Winterside Drive and could not believe her eyes.

"Tom—are you real?" His brief notes about coming home had said lately he'd probably not be back until mid-August.

He came in a rush toward her, in spite of the heat, and in a remembered childhood way spun her around twice. Their mother had called it "surrounding Brook."

"I'm real enough. I missed everything and everybody in South Ebury. And I had to have news of the *Press* so I pulled out of Washington this morning and hurried home." Then he said, attempting to make it sound offhand, "Is there a new owner at the *Press*?"

She stood there uncertain, her heart bounding with eagerness to tell him and unwilling to, yet. "Yes," she said unsteadily, "there is. I've just come from there," she said.

"What were you doing there? Who is it, for goodness' sake?"

"I was looking at some old files."

"And who did you say it was?"

"I think," she said, "you'd get an interview now."

"Come on," he said. "Come with me for luck and I'll ask for my old job." At the door he stopped and ran his fingers through his hair. "Now, have a look."

"Breathtaking," she said. "I know because you took mine away and I haven't got it back yet."

He smiled, reassured, and pushed open the door.

She didn't mean to, because she wanted to see every last detail, but try as she might, her vision was suddenly blurred and to stop the tears from overflowing she had to blink hard. Tom turned to her and put his arm round her shoulder and, after Dad had welcomed Tom, held Brook's hand inside his, tightly, exactly as he used to do when she was six.

The returned traveler, Tom, was being listened to attentively. The roast chicken stood neglected, and the browned potatoes as well, as he said, "Everything in the *Press* must go. Every piece of padding, beginning with *Rovings and Arrivings* up to and including *Out of the Mouths of Babes*."

"Don't shout, Tom," Philip said. "I agree with you. Everyone here agrees with you." Then, catching sight of Sam Falter's surprised stare, "Almost everybody agrees with you."

"Instead," Tom went on, heedless, "we'll try a bit

of painless education. We've been needing book reviews and I'm bound to get to that Science page and for front page news we'll run that series Dad's written."

Jane nodded encouragement and Tom found the agreement altogether pleasing and acceptable. "And cut out the complete waste of space represented by the bellowing ads for Wherry's Supersales." Then he too saw Sam Falter's face. "Don't you agree, Dad?"

"Why, at the risk of appearing ungrateful for a new and impressive title," Sam Falter said, "I would say you'd outlined a pretty dull newspaper and a pretty fast way to go out of business."

"But compare what we're offering with the present *Press*, Dad."

"Compare it with the present, all you like, but don't throw out the things that are keeping your readers, however few, reading the *Press*. You'll have to do a much slower job, Tom, I'm thinking, and you will really have to let your readers recognize something in it as being familiar. Why, Tom, if they want a brand-new paper they'll just subscribe to the *Medbury Gazette*, which is close enough to South Ebury so they even feel neighborly. The truth is they *want* the South Ebury *Press*. They like the news of South Ebury and they like *Rovings and Arrivings*.

I'd like to see that Science page, but you couldn't have it at the expense of *Out of the Mouths of Babies*, though one day you might do something about these impossible headings."

They were really in it, Brook sat thinking. She could scarcely believe they were really in it. The things they were talking about could happen, would be made to happen. All of them were in it and all of them could make it work.

"Perhaps get all the knitting and babes over with, in a single page," Sam Falter suggested, observing Tom's apparent disappointment. "I think a Home Page, for instance, is enough, if you don't want that stuff sprawling all over. Looks better, too."

From below came a low long growl. Brush, at the door, was making the beginning noise of a welcoming bark. Then the bell rang, a long *one* and a short *two-three*, and the barking began in earnest. But of course it couldn't be. They'd be past Chicago now—and then came the stifled joyous bark of Brush being told to be quiet by an old friend.

"Sue!"

"I had to come back." Sue looked as though she had not only run up the steps but all the way from the Middle West. "I thought of all the fun you'd be having with the *Press* under new management and

I kept feeling more and more helpless as I sat in the train rushing miles and miles farther from South Ebury. I just burst into tears, finally. Mother said, 'For heaven's sake you can't cling to your childhood all your life' and Aunt Elly said, 'Why not,' which made it worse and at last when we were approaching Chicago, Dad said, watching me as if I were coming down with something, 'No doubt Sue has that newspaper bug under her skin, too, like Sam Falter and young Falter, for that matter.'

" 'Well, they've offered me a job,' I said, and told him about a page I would do about news in the home and interior decoration and advice about children. I was making it up as I went along and I must say it sounded fine to me and must have sounded all right to Dad too, because he said, 'Well, I guess the Falters will put you up for a few days until you find a place to live' and I told him I'd already asked the people who'd bought our house and they'd let me have my own old room. You know," Sue slowed down to double normal speed, "I did ask them, thinking about this job you might offer me—"

Sam Falter looked delighted. "This is without doubt in the realm of telepathy," he said. "A minute before you'd arrived we had been hunting high and low for a Home Page Editor."

"Lucky you were passing by," Tom said.

"Lucky for me," Sue said, once more on the verge of tears.

Brook gently took her arm, "Come upstairs, Sue. I'll get you into battle dress, out of fatigue uniform."

Days later they were still outlining the new *Press*. And weeks later. They worked until their vision was blurred.

They were proudest that there hadn't been a break in their subscribers' numbers.

The new paper had made its appearance twice as big, twenty times as exciting, they were certain, and their greatest achievement the bold black headline: *The First of Six Articles on Alcohol*, by Sam Falter. Along with everything else were the county news, the kindergarten news, the knitting news, *Out of the Mouths of Babes*, and *Rovings and Arrivings*.

"More good things inside," Sue said, eagerly turning to her page. *Sue Willey's Home Page* headed it. The name, Tommy irritatingly told her, might have some sentimental value for the old folks, but Sue was impervious today to all adverse criticism since her name appeared in 14-point type.

Sam Falter had gone home at last and Sue and Philip and Tom and Brook walked along the road toward Maybury and, just as the moon came up,

rounded the Parkway and sat beside Frog Pond.

They should have been tired, even discouraged, because for this single issue they had worked with all their minds and hearts and hands, yet they were not at all tired.

"There'll be fifty cancellations by three o'clock tomorrow," Tommy began the predictions.

"A protest from the Blue Bell Tavern about the Alcohol article. Maybe a threat," Philip added.

"And then silence," Sue said. They were sad prognostications, all too likely to be proved true, they all felt, but somehow the thought of them only made their hearts lighter. Only one thing was important. They had—Sam Falter directing—achieved an issue of the *Press* that they themselves approved of. It was enough.

There were no cancellations. A Mrs. Kornmeister complained of not having received her copy of the *Press* and could one be hurried over as she'd heard from Mrs. Miller at the bakery there was a mighty fine piece about drunkenness in it. She knew somebody, she confided, she was anxious to show it to.

As Philip had intimated, the *Press* was notified to stop delivering to the Blue Bell Tavern until further notice. Five people in Maybury, however, wondered if they were in the delivery district for South Ebury

and if so, could the subscriptions begin with this issue. Perhaps this word-of-mouth campaign, they thought, would make up for the Tavern and its followers.

"But aren't they the people we want to reach?" Sue asked.

"They are," Sam Falter said, "and we're going to keep them on the delivery list. They'll read it. They'll hate it and read it."

At noon, two days later, Sam Falter announced an emergency staff meeting.

Tom said, "I can't, this minute. I'm running this order for printed stationery and I have three hundred to go."

"Well then, no later than dinner tonight."

It left a long time for concentrated worry on Brook's part. She could not even bring herself to ask whether it was good or bad news.

At dinner Sam Falter appeared calm. There was a serious note in his voice, however, unlike the banter that had prevailed up to and including the first day of publication.

"Members of the South Ebury staff," Sam Falter began. "I'll have to report first that the phone's been going constantly for two days. Tom will bear me out. Four-fifths congratulations—according to a carefully

tabulated record we've been keeping—and one-fifth on the contrary. One call I will have to report on at length, however. It ought to have your consideration as soon as possible."

In the silence the clock was heard ticking loudly.

"The *Medbury Gazette* has made an offer for the *Press*."

"In that case," Tom said at once, "we must be good."

"We are good," Sam Falter said imperturbably. "I've promised them a quick answer and, while it doesn't have to be so quick as to prevent serious thought, perhaps we'd better start thinking."

All of them sat in stuffy pride hanging on Sam Falter's words and Brook's fears and worries had gathered themselves up quietly and disappeared. "It's a pretty good offer," Sam Falter added. "An offer to buy us out."

"Naturally we won't sell," said Philip. "And inasmuch as I am not entitled to an opinion, not being even part-owner, and haven't been consulted and don't, at the moment, own the price of the swivel-chair, I hope my opinion will count for something. Especially as I haven't any notion of what this may mean in terms of capital gains."

"It means," Sam Falter explained patiently, "that

the owners of the *Press* of South Ebury, Mrs. Jane Falter and Miss Brook Falter, with an optional share owned by Thomas Falter, are in a position to profit \$4,750."

"You mean they offered fifteen thousand?"

"A first offer, naturally," Sam Falter said, "and, incidentally, their National Syndicate is offering to buy the Alcohol articles separately."

So it was Sam Falter they were after, Brook thought, exactly as she had suspected when first he had begun talking about their offer.

She said, "Dad, you did say it isn't for sale, didn't you?"

"Why, no, Brook. I've no authority to refuse to sell. It's your paper."

"You really don't think we ought to consider it, now that we're launched, do you, Sam?" Jane inquired.

"We can sell the Syndicate rights, of course. It comes to what's generally regarded as a pretty penny. But about the *Press*, that's another story, and they'd want to take it over. They would be willing, and I quote, 'to retain as many of the staff as would be required to edit a South Ebury section.' "

"What would a South Ebury section consist of?" Brook asked.

"I'd say a half-page, or more probably just the *Rovings and Arrivings* column."

"But why in the world do they want it if they're just going to reduce it to a half-page?"

"Well, they're spreading out. Or would like to. They'd like to make one strong paper out of a few weak ones. We are, presumably, weak. The *Medbury Gazette* is strong and can be made stronger."

"We'd rather have it the other way round," Tom said. "Perhaps we'll be the ones to spread out."

Sam Falter nodded, impressed. "The first reasonable words I've heard all day."

"Then," Brook summed up, "is No the answer?"

"No is the answer," Jane said. "Since my partner consents, why I also consent not to consent."



Above and beyond Maybury pale mauve-gray clouds were outlined in purest gold. It was one of Dr. Davitt's ordinary miracles, Brook supposed, but it came exactly at the right moment, came so especially prepared to shine upon their endless fair hopes, that for the moment it was not an ordinary miracle at all but an extraordinary one. They must all have felt its implicit promise for now they sat silently, Tom and Sue, Philip and Brook on the low stone

bench, beside Frog Pond, watching the sun drop and its departure light up all the sky.

"Never believe it is just another day," Dr. Davitt had said, in the course of one of her Wednesday afternoons. "Each day is peculiar to itself. It has its particular attributes and has never been before and will never be again."

*. . . has never been before and will never be again.* The words brought back to Brook a morning of early childhood. The sound of a deep-throated foghorn came from the river and she ran to the window and struggled to open it—they were the windows that opened like doors, inward. The smell of the air was fresh and new, perhaps it was the smell of earliest spring, and the sound was merged with it and became one with it. It was as though all else were gray and that morning alone touched with gold, as were the edges of these clouds, making it pulsate and live, and indeed it was a coming to life and an awakening, because since then it had become an unforgettable moment—that sound and smell together—and was forever associated with childhood and an open window and a sweet beginning.

Perhaps that is Dr. Davitt's rare gift, Brook thought, being aware and conscious of every bright good thing. Why, that is being alive, that is being

truly alive. She was so surprised at the discovery she would not speak of it to the others, guarding it for herself, for a time.

There had been other such moments when something caught at her heart and there was another awakening and being more aware than she had been a moment before.

She had looked up from the kitchen doorway this morning to see distantly a flock of pigeons wheeling into the sun. Astonishingly, the underside of their wings was pure silver. As they wheeled downward, there was the pure silver on either side of the rich golden-brown slender body. Up in little star-shaped flecks and down in silver and golden-brown. Had anyone else in all of South Ebury seen that wonder of flight into the blue? And now this, too, would remain with her as such things did—as the foghorn sound in the spring air did—and would make this day particular and peculiar to itself.

More than any other thing, it would do that, more than even the news from the Queens College Board of Admissions this morning that told her she was on the list of accepted candidates.

Philip stood up. "Shall we go?" he asked.

Tom and Sue were already walking slowly homeward. Watching them walking ahead together, it oc-

curred to Brook that if Sue hadn't come back, Tom would certainly have gone to bring her back, no matter how far west Wilbur Willey had transported his daughter.

She smiled at her thought and took Philip's extended hand. He helped her up and held her hand an instant longer. Then when he released it she looked at it for a moment, fingers extended. That was the hand, she thought, on which she had counted a problem for every finger.

"I've thought of a way we could help each other," Philip said. "We could each keep a notebook for special references and collect an enormous amount of material to exchange during the times I come home."

"And newspaper clippings, besides," she said, "and reports of new scientific research on any subject related to what we're doing."

"Many people have worked together that way," he said, "worked together all their lives in research."

She glanced up at his profile, earnest and clear-cut in the deepening light and wondered whether he knew he had asked that they share their life's work and whether he meant it that way. She glanced away. Yes, he knew.













(continued from front flap)

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